

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH THE 3C MODEL: CHRIST,
COMPASSION AND CHURCH TO OVERCOME
ABUSE IN LAS VEGAS, SIN CITY

Brenda Braam

B. S., Regents University Virginia Beach, 2010
MDiv, Virginia Union University, 2013
M. A., Liberty University, 2015

Mentors

Robert C. Walker, DMin
Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr., DMin

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2019

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
ABBREVIATIONS	viii
EPIGRAPH	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	5
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	26
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	61
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	81
5. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	102
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS	123
APPENDIX	
A. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECT FLYER	150
B. SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS	152
C. EMPOWERMENT PROJECT PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE	154
D. GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	156

BIBLIOGRAPHY	158
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ABSTRACT

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by
Brenda Braam
United Theological Seminary, 2019

Mentors

Robert C. Walker, DMin
Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr., DMin

Abused and marginalized women in Las Vegas, Nevada, are in need of safe places to meet challenges of domestic violence and become empowered with the aid of the church, professional counseling and the spirit of God. The hypothesis is that they can overcome many of these obstacles with guidance and leadership. This ministry model is a dual context of Second Baptist Church and Bridge of Faith Ministry. A six-week training program and classes led by experts will take place along with a Survivor Sister's Breakfast and an Empowerment Symposium. A mixed methodology approach will gain results from the data gathered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother, Myrtle Glover, who prayed for me and gave me counsel and direction for my life.

I am blessed to have been divinely partnered with such incredible and amazing mentors who guided me through this doctoral program and spiritual journey: Dr. Robert Walker, Dr. Kenneth Cummings, and Dr. Harold Cottam. I am grateful for divine providence that allowed our paths to intersect for such a time as this. I am sincerely thankful for each of you. I also want to thank Dr. D. Edward Chaney, my pastor and professional associate, for kindly encouraging and praying for me during this rigorous process. I am grateful and thankful to Dr. Audrey Fleming-Hawkins, my professional associate, who was also there to provide input and encouragement throughout the program.

This project would not have gained the traction it required without the courageous women survivors who walked with me during this journey. These women were handpicked by the Holy Spirit. Always remember that God has great things in store for your lives. You are an awesome, powerful group of women.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my beloved husband, Phillip Gladstone Braam. God brought me to this place and point in my life. With your encouragement, I made it through this program. You persevered without complaint with me spending a large portion of our vacations in the library writing and doing research. For that I am grateful and thankful. When I was overwhelmed and thought of quitting and walking away, you told me to trust the process. I sincerely thank you for your love and support. You are God's blessing to me, and I truly appreciate you.

ABBREVIATIONS

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SBC	Second Baptist Church

The challenge is to bring forward and identify positive images of female leadership and at the same time destroy the myth of “otherness”: the assumption that women are peripheral and secondary historical objects of church and community life.

—Vashti M. McKenzie: *Not Without a Struggle*

INTRODUCTION

Progressing through the doctoral program has been challenging and has made me truly trust the process. Overall, the process has been a good one. It has blessed me, stressed me, and progressed me. The journey has been one of both highs and lows while filled with many twists and turns. The greatest and most difficult challenge was the spiritual autobiography paper. Although I have written this information many, many times while matriculating through my Master of Divinity work, it was different this time. It caused me to take a more thorough self-examination of how I arrived at this point in my life. This assessment provided an understanding of my faith and calling to the ministry. As I reflected over my life, God used many people at different times to disciple, nurture, and help me to grow. Each person was instrumental to my spiritual development and journey. This program has made me be very transparent regarding my ministry. The path and ministry were predestined due to my life experiences.

I started the doctoral program as a minister whose husband is not a clergy. We were living in Virginia where I served in many ministerial capacities. I was a chaplain serving at three correctional facilities, and I worked in a pastoral care department as a hospital chaplain. It appeared to others that I was overextended and doing too much. Actually, I enjoyed working each ministry immensely and handled the duties effortlessly. At the beginning of my doctoral program, we relocated to Las Vegas, Nevada. I was out of corrections and hospital chaplaincy with no ministry context. Not sure what God had

in store for my future, I prayed and waited for clear direction. God had another path and plan for my life. I serve as associate minister at Second Baptist Church as the first woman minister in their seventy-six-year history. As a lifelong advocate for women, my ministry context is now empowering abused and marginalized women. As the conclusion of my matriculation at United Theological Seminary draws nearer, my goal is to present a doctoral thesis that not just covers my journey academically but also emphatically. My objective is to clearly articulate what my project is and to show the reasons why it was chosen.

The thesis and following project are entitled “Empowering Women through the 3C Model: Christ, Compassion and Church to Overcome Abuse in Las Vegas, Sin City.” The project was not a quick decision or done haphazardly; rather, it came about through deliberation, prayer, and serious self-examination. The remainder of this introduction will give an overview of each chapter and show how it is connected as an overall unit that supports and undergirds this thesis.

Chapter one, the Ministry Focus, deals with three areas of my life. It speaks to my journey that eventually directed me to my calling and ministry. It entails my life’s path that guided me to ministry. It also involves my ministerial trajectory. It focuses on my ministry gifts and passion. Secondly, it addresses the context of my ministry. Second Baptist Church is a large African American Church located in the heart of the black community in Las Vegas. Serving in this area and capacity certainly has many challenges which includes, specifically, abuse and misogynistic behavior against women: both in the churches and community. The second part of my context is a para-church ministry that I started called “Bridge of Faith Outreach Ministry.” Thirdly, this component emphasizes a

synergy where my calling and ministry gifts are united together with the necessities of the context. This leads to a thesis and ministry project on “empowering abused women.”

Chapter two, the Biblical Foundation, supports the thesis through revelation that Old Testament and New Testament scriptures speak to the subject of empowering marginalized and abused women. The Old Testament scripture chosen is Ruth 1: 1-12. It was chosen because both Naomi and Ruth were destitute and had no patriarch to cover them or help them. They worked diligently to not become beggars or worse. They empowered one another, encouraged each other, and stood by one another in their hardest times. It also gives insight into the faithfulness of God towards us. The New Testament scripture selected was John 4: 14-26. These texts speak to the empowerment that Jesus did with women. Jesus never silenced, mistreated, abused or marginalized women.

Chapter three, Historical Foundation, follows the historical aspect of a movement of abused and marginalized African American women through the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. It also brings to light the great contributions of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C.J. Walker. Each of these women were able to overcome the racism and segregation of their era. They excelled and defied the adversities of their time to make major impact and strides. These women are icons and are still celebrated today.

Chapter four, Theological Foundation, provides a firm basis for the theological structure of empowering women. Womanist theology is based on the complex realities of black women’s lives. Black liberation theology is the belief that the God of freedom has created African Americans to be free and to reach their full humanity of fighting against and overcoming obstacles of injustice, racism, prejudice, and segregation blocking their

way. Pneumatology speaks to how the Holy Spirit empowers and uses women for service. Ecclesiology is the theological lens that relates to the church and the body of believers, including women, who are called to serve God and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter five, Theoretical Foundation, explores empowering women from various perspectives such as education, psychology, and leadership. These respective areas are crucial in helping women to overcome all aspects of abuse.

Chapter six, Project Analysis, addresses numerous areas. It will reiterate the thesis, hypothesis and give an explanation and overview of the methodology that was utilized in the project. The project utilized case studies and a mixed methodology. It also clarifies and focuses on the participants who were involved in the project. The implementation process shows the data collection and analysis and project outcomes. This chapter also provides an overview from the summary of learning from every aspect of the program including the Intensives and the Interim Focus Group sessions. It will also show how this project model is capable of being replicated in other communities and ministries.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The context where I serve is Second Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. The congregation is predominately African American believers. The surrounding community has been the victim of drug abuse and poverty for decades. Most of the individuals in the congregation have lived in community for thirty years or longer and are natives of Las Vegas. There are also new comers who have moved to the area and have become a part of the church. The people of Second Baptist Church are from diverse backgrounds and life. Second Baptist has large congregation of professional people that range from elected officials, lawyers, doctors, educators, and military retirees. These individuals have a profound commitment and faithfulness to the historical aspect of West Las Vegas and Second Baptist Church. They are people who are highly instrumental in maintaining the dynamic, energetic, and vivacious atmosphere of the church, the community, and the building of God's Kingdom. The individuals that attend the church are from diverse backgrounds. They have done an outstanding job in keeping the church vital and relevant for building up God's Kingdom and uplifting the community.

Context

In February 1942, Second Baptist was founded and organized by a few members. Prior to having a specific place to worship, the meetings were held in the homes of the

nine founding members: Ms. Anderson, Mr. Harris, Mr. Wilson, Rev. Mayfield and his wife Bessie, Ms. Hayes, Ms. Pope, and the Robinsons. Within one year the church grew to over 300 members. The new congregation decided to purchase land to build a church. The members purchased a tent to hold worship services on the land while the new church was being built. The services were held inside the tent for about ten months and they finally went into the new sanctuary.

Over the history and life of the church there have been seven pastors that have served the congregation at Second Baptist and the surrounding community. One of the founders, Rev. Mayfield, served as the first pastor. The next pastor was Rev Haden who was with the congregation for just a two-year period. Rev. Lewis, the third pastor served for a year, but it was under his leadership in 1949 that a building fund was started. Rev. Coleman became the pastor of the church and served the congregation for twenty-five years and retired due to health issues. Rev. Jefferson became the fifth pastor and served the congregation for only two years. It was in June 1978 that Rev. Davis was called to become the sixth pastor.¹

Pastor Willie Davis served the congregation of Second Baptist for twenty-nine years. Under his leadership, the ministry flourished, and the church grew. He became seriously ill and passed away in June 2009. The seventh and current pastor, the Rev. Dr. D. Edward Chaney, was installed in November 2008 at the sixty-seventh anniversary of Second Baptist Church.

Dr. Chaney is a people person and a visionary. The church has grown to close to two thousand members under his leadership. There has been a variety of ministries added

¹ Secondbaptistlv.org, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://secondbaptistlv.org/about>.

that not only serve the church but also the surrounding community. Second Baptist Church is concerned with many of the hardships in the West Las Vegas community.

Each pastor of Second Baptist was instrumental in laying the foundation of the church. There has been substantial growth and outreach into the community that has continued for several decades. The congregation has reached a place of freedom from debt and a series of renovations that has been helpful in many ways. The money from the mortgage burning has been redirected to increase the outreach initiatives in the West Las Vegas community. It has also been helpful in reaching the sick and shut-ins through a Sunday morning radio broadcast. There have been classrooms added to accommodate the growing Sunday school classes, a food pantry, music rooms for the choir, and a lounge for the women. Other additions include an upgraded office for the pastor, administrative offices, and a full state of the art kitchen and dining area.

The church purchased a new van. There was also an upgrade to the multimedia system in the sanctuary and Wi-Fi added for those who prefer to use technology. A nearby restaurant named “Hamburger Heaven” and several adjacent apartments were purchased. The apartments provide housing for the elderly and disabled who would not otherwise be able to afford their own place.

Second Baptist Church is a beautiful edifice that has recently been renovated and modernized. What is disheartening is that some churches are more concerned with the building than the souls of the people. Many people are overly interested in maintaining the status quo in the church. The cliques in the congregation are concerned with upholding traditions and perceived rituals that have nothing to do with salvation or God. This is not an isolated matter, but a measure of this attitude is alive and well in every

church. However, in Second Baptist, they are very much concerned with bringing in lost souls. They place a great emphasis and value on outreach of the community. The building is a gathering place where people can come together as a collective body to fellowship and worship God. It is also a place where God can have free reign in the service and move per his own will. The people are fully aware that it is God's church.

The city of West Las Vegas is in Clark County, Nevada. Currently, Clark County has approximately 1.5 million people who live in the county. There are approximately 105,000 people who live in West Las Vegas. It has become a great area to live in due to new home and apartment construction. There was a statue erected in 2001 in honor of the late Rev. Dr. Martin L. King on the boulevard named for him.

The Cox Cable company has place their main office on Martin Luther King Blvd that runs from East Las Vegas through West Las Vegas and into North Las Vegas and is a main highway for the area. Developers have built a new post office, fast food restaurants, a library with an art gallery and amphitheater. ²Andre Agassi has built two large tuition free K thru 12, college preparatory academies and charter schools in the West Las Vegas community for at risk children. West Las Vegas area is predominately black and a thriving community that is prospering due to new businesses, government agencies, and a renewed interest in rebuilding in the community. There has also been an upsurge of new churches. Churches of all denominations are a part of the West Las Vegas community.

² Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.agassiprep.net/>.

In the community surrounding the church, there are still areas of drug infestation. Men and women with drug and alcohol addictions may never come to church. They are welcome at Second Baptist to receive food and toiletries at the weekly distribution center. Domestic violence and sexual abuse are also major issues where many women live in poverty. Many of the women are not aware of the resources that are available to assist them. There is apathy in the community based on failure, lack of education, resources, and opportunities.

In the drug community, there may not be a strong desire to change among some. There are many that are willing to make the necessary changes to have a better future for themselves and their children. The leadership does not always work favorably on behalf of women. They are often relegated to the sideline and marginalized because of the lack of education and low self-esteem. So often the church overlooks these women and children. Yes, the church may provide a place of worship, food from its pantry, and even transportation. However, when we take a closer look there are serious issues that have yet to be addressed.

Some of the issues like empowerment through education, resources, alcohol/substance abuse assistance, job training, and placement need to be explored. The church may not be totally equipped to handle all these problems. However, a parachurch setting alongside the traditional church will be a great asset in helping to overcome many of these issues. These are problems that have plagued and crippled the African American community for quite some time.³ This limited degree of concern reflects an inner conflict which measures cautiously the impact of any change on the status quo. There are women

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (King Legacy) (Kindle Locations 257-258), Beacon Press, accessed November 7, 2016, Kindle Edition.

who are dealing with domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, clergy abuse, with limited resources and education sitting on the church pews. They are looking for a voice that will speak for them and assist them in their lives.

Ministry Journey

God has commissioned and counted me worthy for the work of the ministry. God gives spiritual gifts, and spiritual talents to every person that receives salvation. I believe God expects for them to be used for the building up and furthering of His Kingdom. As witnesses and ministers, it is important to know and understand, which area of the vineyard God has called us. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”⁴

I was called to the ministry in 1988. I knew being a pew member was no longer possible, and I had to do something. What to do was the issue. I realized that we have to find where we fit in the body of Christ. There are times we will get involved with ministry based on what the pastor or others want us to do. However, we should seek God’s will and purpose for our lives and be led by the Holy Spirit.

My ministry journey entailed working in various areas of the church. I have been a Sunday school teacher, usher and president of the usher board, and a choir member. I have worked as a child and youth pastor, altar worker, evangelist, and associate pastor at more than one church. I was involved in outreach ministry and became the director of the outreach ministry, which involved feeding the homeless, ministering to the incarcerated, sexual, and domestic violence victims, and children in impoverished neighborhoods.

⁴ 2 Peter 1: 10, KJV.

My journey took me to another facet of ministry in visiting the sick and shut in at convalescent homes and becoming a Hope Chaplain in the local hospitals. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) was another area of interest. I began working at the hospital in Richmond, Virginia, for a while as a chaplain working towards my CPE certification. For the past 18 years, consistently, my ministry journey has been in correctional institutions. I have worked in all levels of correctional facilities.

I started in this ministry as a team member volunteer at a men's prison at Southern Desert Correctional Center at Indian Springs, Nevada, for two years. My pastor at the new church requested me to assist Gerry, a sister, who was pregnant. She had been volunteering at the North Las Vegas Detention Center for a few months. Since I was familiar with the incarcerated, they wanted me to take over the slot while she was on maternity leave. I did not want to do it and really procrastinated on giving an answer, but eventually helped. The ministry was to the women on Sunday afternoons. After a couple visits I looked forward to going in to preach to the women.

Gerry returned after a year off and we agreed to alternate months and it worked well. I was committed, faithful and had built a rapport with the ladies inside. They were completing the weekly readings, bible lessons, and praying. We would have spirited services with singing, clapping, and praising God. I felt the two of us was breaking up the fallow ground for God.

Despite the good work I was doing for the Lord, a bad situation took place. Pastor Davis and I had a disagreement over some doctrinal issues that silenced the women and started us having to wear doily head coverings. I refused to submit after a heated

discussion in the women's meeting and ended up leaving the church. Gerry was told to terminate my participation at the detention center with the women.

God had another plan and shortly afterward I was connected to Prison Fellowship, an international ministry. The Regional Director Bob Watson brought me onboard, trained me, and I became a facilitator for his western region. He was instrumental in me becoming a chaplain at the newly opened women's prison in Las Vegas.

For the past eighteen years, I have worked closely with disenfranchised and marginalized people. I was licensed in 1996 and ordained in the Pentecostal denomination in 1998. Much of my ministry journey and context has been inside of jails and prisons working with the incarcerated. I am not a church worker but a Kingdom builder.

God's favor has allowed me to connect with diverse individuals on various levels. My gifts have afforded me opportunities to meet and interact with people. It is with ease that God has blessed me with the ability to relate to those people who are thought of as the dregs of society. I have learned people want to be acknowledged and accepted. They are willing to let their guard down and be open when approached in a friendly non-judgmental way. When possible, it is imperative to let them know they are important and cared for. It allows for an opportunity to share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the love of God.⁵ Whenever we step out to serve, there is favor and blessing. This is because we are moving in the rhythm of the King, the one who came "to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"⁶

⁵ Steve Stewart, *When Everything Changes: Healing, Justice, and the Kingdom of God* (34), Fresh Wind Press, Impact Nations. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Mark 10: 45, ESV.

Every ministry opportunity and open door should be approached prayerfully and with great humility. God wants to accomplish goals and success for the people, which we are sent. To have faith is vital since obstacles and spiritual warfare will undoubtedly be a part of the process. It is important to not become discouraged and remain focused. Have faith and believe that God knows the end results, even when the circumstances appear contrary. God is orchestrating the affairs of our lives and obedience is a key component to faith.

My work as a correctional chaplain, outreach director, substance abuse counselor and domestic violence advocate has brought me to this juncture in life. Each calling and ministry has evoked a different set of emotions within my heart. There has been struggle, passion, love, adoption, protection, and redemption. Agape love has been the proof through every set of circumstances that covers me and the work to which I have been called.

The outreach ministry allows me to witness and become engaged with the needs of the community. It has been my pleasure to serve food to the homeless on the streets of Las Vegas. To care for and minister to the incarcerated men and women who have made countless mistakes because of wrong choices and bad advice from misguided associates is the work of discipleship. My reasonable service is helping to provide shelter and safety to a woman or girl that has been the victim of sex or human trafficking, rape, or beaten and abused by a domestic partner. God desires to reach out to his people, but there must be a willing vessel.

It is imperative that my own personal experience with abuse, alcohol/substance abuse, betrayal, church hurt, and family problems be a catalyst to help others. I can relate

to the suffering and sorrows of other women. It has helped me minister to broken women in unprecedented ways. My sincerity and transparency moved the women to hear the Gospel message and make positive changes in their lives.⁷ Jesus came on a rescue mission. Recognizing this helps us to understand the greater significance of His words and actions.

My role as a junior activist at the Marcus Garvey Center working with Dr. Ron Daniels opened my eyes to the suffering and poverty in the black community. Poverty, has been paramount over the years due to lack of necessities, opportunities, education, drive, determination, resources, money, and support, to name a few. I have witnessed abject poverty, child neglect, substance abuse, apathy, and sorrow in the black communities in both my teen and adult years in Ohio, Nevada, and Virginia. God has commissioned me to be a change agent in my community. God will provide the people, resources, and finances to accomplish this awesome goal. My passion has vacillated over the years because of the apathy that is so prevalent. When I think of the enormity of this task, it is overwhelming and unattainable in my strength. However, God's ways are not ours and any assignment that we try to accomplish for him in our own strength will fail. God can bring it to fruition.

Working through pain, hurt, and obstacles in my life, church, and ministry has made me aware that all of it has been a part of the master's plan. Not having a father figure present in my life created "daddy issues." Over the years there had been a need for approval from male authority figures like pastors, bishops, and apostles. Working with

⁷ Stewart, *When Everything Changes*, 35.

them in the capacity of associate pastor has opened my eyes and mind that only God is perfect, just, and righteous. We are all flawed, imperfect, human beings, subject to error, jealousy, selfishness, and sin, at any given moment. I have learned and experienced that many who pretended to be my greatest advocate was really my greatest adversary.

My licensing, ordination, leaving the church, and being out of fellowship for seasons of my life only strengthened my trust and solidified my faith in God. What is important is to be open and accepting of God's will. My ordination service was on June 25, 1998. The same day that I was awarded the national "Sojourner Truth Award" for outstanding meritorious service on behalf of women, from the National Black Business and Professional Women's Club. Both events were epic moments in my life. I viewed them as a sign that God was pleased with the kingdom work I was doing.

As an associate minister and over several ministries at the church, it was expected for my pastor to attend one of the events. Pastor House did not attend my ordination service or the awards ceremony. The ordination service was special because I was the first female to be ordained in Nevada under our denomination. His personal secretary and administrator, Sherri, was present. She asked me to bring the award to church on Sunday and that the ordination would also be announced. Sherri felt the church should know of my work in the community. I showed up with the award and Bishop House refused to let the ordination be announced or my plaque be shown to the congregation. His reason was "I had not paid tithes that month." My feeling was very hurt, but not enough for me to leave. I stayed and learned there was more rejection, betrayal, and hurt in store for me there.

Clergy abuse is an area that women do not talk about. Instead they withdraw, leave the church, or suffer in silence. Church or clergy abuse can cause women to question their faith in God or believe they are out of God's will if they do not comply with the pastor's or minister's wishes. I find the topic of submission is an area that needs more clarification and discussion in the church. The word is usually taken out of context and is more beneficial to men than women. Having dealt with the submission issue in ministry, I am fully aware how women can be negatively affected and attacked regarding the area of submitting to authority.

This area of abuse is different than substance abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault. It is done in a way that makes it very clear to the women that they will not be used in that church or the ministry unless they are subject to the wishes and requests of the clergy. The request may be broad as sexual advances to questioning a pastor's decision or not agreeing to go along with heresy or wrong doctrine. I have experienced each of these issues and was deeply hurt. When I refused to comply, the pastor silenced me, sat me down, and would not allow me to do anything in the church. Eventually, I had no choice but to leave that ministry. I developed a distrust in pastors and did not want to be affiliated with organized religion for many years. My alternative was working as a hospital or prison chaplain.

I was not aware at the time that this is clergy abuse. The politics of the church saddens me at times. My past experiences have made me distant and untrusting; it is difficult for me to connect, and I find myself often on the fringes at church. When God gives me an assignment, I can carry it out; but the problem lies in not connecting with others in the way I should. I am positive this is rooted in rejection and betrayal because of

bad past experiences in the church. I find it much easier to work in a parachurch setting as a hospital or prison chaplain. There still is a chain of command; however, I am the person designated to oversee the religious programs, and there is no jealousy or power plays. I am accepted, respected, and allowed to manage my department. Most importantly, I can work in my expertise without so much of the politics or vying for positions that goes on in the church.

Develop the Synergy

God has created the body of believers for worship, evangelism, growth, support, fellowship, teaching, preaching and prayer. My doctoral project will depend on working together with the church and the parachurch. God has an expectation of me. The expectation is that I operate in the authority that has been given to me through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. I love the Lord with my whole heart. My problem is with some of the believers that I have encountered through the years. I am not a people pleaser or a band wagon saint who go along with the status quo for fear of standing alone. We must know in whom we believe, what we believe, and why we believe it.⁸ I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He can keep what I have committed.

I am a people person, and it brings me great joy to share Jesus with the lost and hopeless. This is a new season in my life in which God has empowered my purpose. My purpose is to help empower others, women particularly. My thought is how do you empower someone who does not know they need to be empowered? God's leading and direction in this project will answer this and any other questions that prevail.

⁸ 1 Timothy 1: 12.

I intend to move into my project knowing God will open doors, bring those who are to collaborate with me, provide all the necessary tools, and use it for his glory.

Pastoral care has been a very strong area in my ministry. It has been beneficial and has helped me to be non-judgmental and deal with individuals where they are without prerequisites. This quality has been an added strength in my ministry. People want to know they are accepted and not looked down on regardless of their circumstances. This is easy because my philosophy is we are all God's beloved. That includes the drug addict, alcoholic, incarcerated, my adversary, those who dislike me, or even hate what I stand for. They are all God's beloved.

Working for Sprint and Central Telecommunications played a part in my professional development. Interacting with irate customers daily takes a certain amount of stamina and temperament. Respect, patience, civility, and courteousness are developed over time and become innate. Eventually, it is second nature and the easiest way to perform daily work duties. The company also provided training classes on working successfully in highly stress environments. Working with people can cause a very high burnout rate. The key is to not take words or actions personal and to come to a compromised agreement.

It is with a grateful heart that I acknowledge my personal life experiences have been instrumental and helpful in forming and shaping my ministry. I had never thought of being a minister or working in ministry in my youth. From childhood, I always knew salvation and being a committed Christian would be a part of my life. Immediately after receiving salvation and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, I was fully aware God wanted to use me in ministry. I had the zeal but did not know how it would come together for me.

God has a plan and knows how to move his children along the path that they are supposed to be on. My professional experience helped develop the tools required to work with abused women. It takes respect, patience, and humility. These are the same qualities that helped me in my job in telecommunications. Identifying and understanding people's needs and meeting them, if possible, is the connection.

My educational development has given me the skills required to research, strategize, implement, and complete a project. My Bachelor of Science degree in Organizational Leadership and Management covered a range of topics which include management, sociology, communication, finances, and business strategies. I can analyze market research, facilitate meetings, supervise/manage business restructuring, and evaluate market research. This knowledge will be an asset to my project.

The Master of Divinity Degree gave me a deeper insight into the literary and historical aspect of the biblical text. My Pentecostal background did not place emphasis very much on education. More emphasis is placed on the move of the Holy Spirit, which I find to be wonderful in context. Biblical studies are generally from personal revelation and not from line-upon-line precepts in most cases. In my opinion there is too much personal ideology and feelings interjected into the text. However, knowing this has allowed me to delve deeper to the scriptures and historical aspect of the bible. Seminary has opened my mind to constructive criticism and greater paradigms.

Working with alcohol, substance abusers, and mental health patients over the years has been a part of the ministry of working with women. My Master's Degree in Human Service Counseling, Addictions and Recovery can help to advance the doctoral

project. Abuse has many forms and cycles attached; helping others to recognize them is a key element to recovery.

Recently, we relocated from Virginia to Las Vegas, Nevada. God placed the desire to move back after being away twelve years. I feel it is a supernatural pull and God has a plan that will be unfolded in due season. It is a matter of being in tune to God and being led by the Holy Spirit. Progressing at the right time and listening to God's guidance is significant. The pastor of Second Baptist Church has taken steps toward improving the West Las Vegas community. Pastor Chaney advised me that the church is highly involved in to the community. This fits well with my project. The church is currently working with the Rescue Mission, and as I previously stated, have a food distribution center and pantry.

I will eventually start a spiritual substance abuse recovery program. There is a powerful connection to the community through the work that is being done at the church. Having been an Outreach Director at Mountaintop Faith Ministries in Las Vegas, this is an area of ministry I understand. To be successful in this ministry there must be a core group of committed individuals that are willing to do the work. They cannot be fearful of the people they serve and must extend themselves beyond what they are accustomed to. Only then will the ministry be successful. Working with marginalized and disenfranchised people is not the easiest thing to do. They usually do not look and act like "good Christian people." Abused people may have occasion to lash out, be rude, hurtful, and cynical. To accomplish God's work, this behavior may have to be addressed or sometimes overlooked. Education is always a positive tool to move individuals forward.

Coming into the United Theological Seminary Doctoral Program in the middle of transition brings multiple challenges. I was not sure what my project would be. My initial ministry context was a correctional chaplain at a men's facility. This has been the area of ministry that I have been a part of for eighteen years. I was familiar and comfortable with this context and could write on any number of problems. Re-entry initiatives and the church was my first choice. My relocation to Las Vegas, Nevada from Virginia in September 2016 changed my life. The prison is no longer a viable ministry topic or context.

Truthfully, there was no real interest in pursuing re-entry or corrections as my doctoral project. I did not know what project I would do. Working with my mentors and after lengthy discussions about my passion, it began to materialize. They helped me find the area of ministry that interested me the most. Dr. Cummings and Dr. Walker were patient and helpful. Once the project idea and context were agreed on, we moved forward. It was exciting because, finally, I have a project that will bless the community, the church, and the women who will be involved.

The pastor of Second Baptist has agreed to work with me and is onboard to assist in any way possible. The project is women's empowerment. My goal is to open a women's empowerment center that will work on the behalf of abused women. The center will focus on the various types of abuse women are dealing with.

I am in process of becoming recertified to work with women who are dealing with domestic violence. Working with an agency will provide some of the information and data for a portion of the project. The groups cover women from a diverse social economic, age, race, and sexual orientation. Las Vegas is a transient city with people

coming and going every day. The local community is the same as any other; however, there are more instances for abuse to take place. It is a city with twenty-four-hour gambling, free drinks in the casino, the new marijuana dispensaries, and money lost and won. Each of these are problems that can potentially be major contributors of abusive behavior.

My women's empowerment project will deal with self-worth, being in control of one's own destiny, and creating an unbiased economic and social mandate. When women are educated and have economic stability, they are better equipped to affect change in their environment and society. However, more work should be done on behalf of empowering women. The empowerment process must be both transformative and practical simultaneously.

Since this project is all about empowering women that have suffered abuse, it is imperative to help build self-esteem to be successful. Women often endure a great amount of hardship mainly because of inequalities and prejudice. The upsurge of single mothers has created more poverty and economic discrimination in the black communities. Women in black communities deal with adversity in numerous ways. Empowering women in this community is an essential tool that will help promote progress, improvement, growth, promotion, and advancement that will decrease poverty and hardship.

When women are empowered, they influence the wellbeing and productivity of family and society. The empowerment project and center will inspire women to shatter the physical and psychological restraints of society and religion traditions. Women who are oppressed and suppressed are at a disadvantage and cannot see their actual strength or

benefit. Women have an important role in society to educate, guide, lead, and help the next generation achieve upward mobility and success.

The impact educating and empowering women in the community will change character, bring uniqueness, and provide independence. Our black communities will thrive and flourish when women become more knowledgeable. There is a need deficiency, a failing that has taken place toward women that must be rectified. The issue is an ongoing matter that has increasingly gained momentum throughout history.

There is a need for the ideals spoken by Jesus and Paul regarding class discriminations, freedom, and social, sexual, and ethnic backgrounds to be pushed to the front burner. There is an urgency motivated by the increasingly hostile environment to these diversities and persistent institutional social, racial, gender, and class prejudices.⁹

Abuse toward women is a continuing theme that has been passed down for generations. My role as a counselor and advisor will allow women to have a safe place to communicate their issues and receive the edification they need to achieve success by helping alleviate negative patterns and providing strategies to overcome these oppressive inequalities. The pertinent necessity to empower women in my ministry context will be a great contribution that can improve the community. The vehicle to achieve this project will be education and support groups that affirm and promote change within. Helping the women to work on goals for the future and the ability to strive to reach them courageously is done one person at a time. This will allow for growth and measurable success.

⁹ Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, Revised & Updated. Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry, (Kindle Locations 1443-1444).

Conclusion

Whenever a large project is in the beginning stages, it appears difficult, even intimidating. There may be many obstacles to overcome. The empowerment project hopefully will not have the complications or impediments that seem imminent. I have worked with women in numerous capacities for many years. Women issues can be problematic since there is a tendency for almost everything to be an emergency or a reason for offense. Personally, these situations cannot impede progress. Without a change in mindset there will not be much success. It is imperative that the process bring about a desired result of women having a change in mindset. Only then will it bring about influence in the home and in community decisions. My goal is in working to empower women to address behavior problems and self-sabotage that impedes progress. This will not be performed beyond my scope of practice, but with collaborative initiatives.

In my opinion, the empowerment of women is long overdue. There are still so many male paradigms and prejudices against women to be addressed. Areas such as pay, promotion, abuse, sexual harassment, assault, domestic violence and poverty can be overwhelming for women. The burden of providing the everyday fundamental need in families belong to women. With this knowledge in mind, women are systematically denied many opportunities.

It is my goal and objective to prayerfully assist women to become more effective in God and the Kingdom. I am passionate and hopeful about the project. Women are already requesting a bible study class and resources to help them to become better equipped to serve God. The education, tools, resources, gifts, and knowledge that God

has imparted in my life is evidence that this project will be successful. By faith I know God is leading and directing my life and this empowerment project.

I found my journal from the year 2003 that was full of prayers and requests. The journal had been packed away in a box. I had written a prayer request regarding opening a women's center to empower women. I am amazed at how God is allowing me to know that this is the right direction, and the Holy Spirit is leading my doctoral project to help the women who may not have been privileged or have been overlooked.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Women have had a special place with God from the time of the Garden of Eden. Although there have been mistakes, difficulties, and problems surrounding women, God has never forgotten or forsaken them. In the Old Testament scriptures, there was much controversy regarding women's roles. On many occasions throughout the bible, women have had to speak up and speak out due to unequal treatment. Historically, women have been marginalized and have had to overcome rejection. The most problematic issues have often been a result of emotional responses and actions associated with family, marital and work relationships. In most cases, the hardships encountered were not always their fault. What has been instrumental and helpful for women is their ability to trust and depend on God. More than anything else this has been the comfort and support that have carried so many women through their natural life. "Charm is deceptive, and beauty *is* fleeting, but a woman *who* fears, the LORD, is to be praised."¹

My passion is women helping women in the ministry context of domestic violence, substance abuse, clergy abuse, and mass incarceration. Women's empowerment is the project to be conducted through Second Baptist Church and Bridge of Faith

¹ Proverbs 31: 30.

Outreach, Inc., in the West Las Vegas community. In this predominately black area, women of various cultures, races, and religions are faced with all sorts of economic and social challenges.

The name of this project is: Empowering and Training Women Through the 3C Model Christ, Compassion, and Church to overcome abuse and adversity in Las Vegas, Sin City. The death of a spouse, divorce, different types of abuse, such as substance, and intimate partner, and even clergy, are the major contributors to women's suffering and difficulties. Women are told that God is with them, and God cares about them and to not worry. They have become the breadwinners and heads of household for the family. Single parent female homes are now standard and usually without a support system. Women are a significant percent of the workforce and the majority of the congregation in churches and in the community. They are also the major financial contributors, supporters, and are participatory in community programs and church ministries. However, when adversities and problems arise for women, the church, nor the community, where they live and serve, is not always supportive. Not enough initiative is put forth to reach out to women that are abused, addicted, divorced, widows, single parents, and elderly. In most cases, these women are left to fend for themselves. It is a crucial issue for females of all races and religions in this country. The West Las Vegas community and the churches have not given this the backing and assistance it requires.

Much too often women end up living in abuse and poverty without the necessary help needed. God's plan, nor purpose for women, is none of the above. God is very concerned about women and their issues. God is a powerful advocate on behalf of women and has never shifted nor changed his love for women though history. God's law states,

“Do not take advantage of the widow or fatherless. If you do and they cry out me. I will certainly hear their cry at all to Me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows, and your children fatherless.”²

It is imperative to work diligently toward an advanced solution for women’s issues. “The academic enterprise is being articulate, in spiritual, ecclesial, social, political, and economic implications of the tridimensional phenomenon of race, class, and gender oppression.”³ Leadership in the churches and communities have a measure of accountability to not only acknowledge, but also identify what women are up against in their relationships, jobs, and homes.

In this paper, the writer will concentrate on scripture that will specifically address how women are fundamental in the God’s Kingdom. The Old Testament foundational text is in the book of Ruth chapter one and focuses on women and their unique place with God. The New Testament foundational text is the Gospel of John chapter 4: the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well. He knows her past and present situation, her sin, and still empowers her to speak on his behalf.

Literary Setting

Old Testament

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while

² Exodus 22: 24.

³ Joanne M. Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 6.

in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me? May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband?" Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. (Ruth 1: 1-12).

According to Frederick Tiffany and Sharon Ringe, "The first step in encountering a biblical text is similar to the early stages of a relationship with a person."⁴ In any sincere friendship or association, getting to know someone is highly significant. We make this happen when we pay attention and intently listen to their words and to what is being spoken. Also, we formulate our thoughts and begin to ask pertinent questions. It is also true when an examination and analysis of the text is conducted. "Take time to acknowledge aloud or to make notes of your initial impressions, reactions, and questions in response to the passage."⁵ There are prerequisites to the studying and writing of what is happening in Ruth chapter one. Preliminary questions in the book of Ruth must be

⁴ Frederick Tiffany and Sharon Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1996), 55.

⁵ Tiffany and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation*, 55.

answered. Frederick Tiffany and Sharon Ringe advise to, “Pay close attention to the specific words and details by which it unfolds.”⁶

In the literary analysis of Ruth chapter one, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the information regarding this book. “The Hebrew Bible locates Ruth among the Writings, the division of the canon that includes wisdom literature and Psalms. It is one of the ‘Five Scrolls’ or Megilloth, and is set apart for liturgical use in major religious festivals in Judaism.”⁷

The literary form and structure can easily separate Ruth into two books: one the poetic and a prose tale. The genre is a short story or novella and the narrative of a love story. Ruth’s story unfolds much like a parable with a poetic, literary, historical setting with the writer narrating the events. It is captivating since parables are similar to what typical Christians are accustomed to reading the bible today. The writer tells the story of Ruth’s exceptional loyalty and devotion to Naomi, her mother-in-law. The writer depicts how God uses Ruth to deliver Naomi and also secure a place as an ancestor of David and Judah’s anointed lineage of kings.

In this writing, the biblical account is not just historical. The background information is chosen to convey specific details in the story from a unique perspective, for an exact purpose, instead of just communicating and detailing facts. It is a lot like Joshua and Judges being a part of a conversation about its origin.⁸ Although it is a story, it also has factual inferences. The narrative speaks of loyalty, faithfulness, and a blessing

⁶ Tiffany and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation*, 55.

⁷ Kathleen Farmer, “Introduction to Ruth,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: TN: Abington Press, 1994), 383.

⁸ Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2002), 261.

that only materializes through hardship, famine, and death. The book of Ruth should be examined in its entirety and not just by individual scripture verses. Reading scripture with an eye to its sensitivity is an important task for which biblical scholarship has a major responsibility.⁹

In Chapter One, the emphasis is on Naomi's severe loss and Ruth's passionate and faithful commitment. The chapter has three divisions: verses 1-5 is the opening scene of this text where tragedy strikes; verses 6-14 shares Naomi's heartbreak, grief and interaction, between her daughter's-in-law and the departure of Orpah to Moab; and verses 15-18 give an account of Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi and return to Bethlehem. The nuances of the chapter are these two women live in a patriarchal culture where choices regarding relocation and money matters are male dominated. Like most biblical accounts, the book presupposes that a woman's status depends on her place in a male-dominated household. The death of her menfolk leaves Naomi as the head of her family.¹⁰

With all the issues in the lives of these women, there is an element of strength and distinction. It is evident they empowered one another by agreeing to remain together no matter what the future held for them. There is merit and value based on the decision to endure adversity and to persevere in faith. God orchestrates the affairs of one's life even in the darkest of times. To develop an effective foundation for this project, the writer is constructing the case this project endeavors to make. Women can overcome adversity, empower one another, and be successful.

⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 99.

¹⁰ Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, 261.

Literary structure implies that the end of Ruth's story is the purpose of the writing. The book's intent is to illustrate the family ancestry and lineage beginning with the genealogy of Perez in Ruth 4:18. Understanding the objective is essential to the accurate insight of the biblical text and how the data, details, and occurrences are addressed. The canonical use of scripture is to some extent, in the arrangement of the narratives, the highlight of certain biblical features in Old Testament language.¹¹

Historical Setting

Ruth's author is not known, and this is one of the main reasons bible experts have not been clear on when the story was written. It has been suggested by several scholars that Samuel may have been the writer. The timeline covered by Stephen H. Miller indicates, "Ruth probably lived about 1100 BC, since she was David's great-grandmother and he ruled as king about 1000 BC."¹² "A non-Jewish woman is the ancestor of Israel's greatest dynasty of kings from David to the King of kings, Jesus."¹³

Post-exilic Ruth 1:1, describes this as the time when the Judges ruled in Israel before the era of kings. People did what was right in his or her own eyes and were in a constant state of disobedience and sin. "The experiences and attitudes in Ruth also mirror the Judeans who returned from exile and attempted to rebuild the lives."¹⁴

¹¹ Richard N. Longnecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publisher, 1999), 118.

¹² Stephen H. Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2007), 80.

¹³ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 80.

¹⁴ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 383.

The geographical setting for chapter one of Ruth is Bethlehem-Judah also named Bethlehem-Ephrath. The city's location was about six miles south of Jerusalem.

According to John Eadie, "It occupies the eastern ridge of a hill and when seen from a distance it has an imposing appearance. It was located in the midst of a fertile district before the famine."¹⁵ In verse 1 chapter 1, it states, "during the era of when the Judges ruled there were an extended drought and famine that caused the farmland and the grazing fields in Southern Israel to dry up."¹⁶ Migration due to famine is not uncommon in the Old Testament. Famine and drought are affiliated with disobedience towards God. "Famine is the implication of some of the traditional covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28."¹⁷ The famine in the land is indicative of Israel's nature of repetitive sin and judgment. Since there is no word about famine in the Judges, it is possible that war or invasion was the cause.

God's promise to the people of faith was there would always be abundance if the people were obedient,

And it shall be that if you earnestly obey my commandments which I command You today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give *you* the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. Moreover, I will send grass in your fields for your livestock that you may eat and be filled.¹⁸

¹⁵ John Eadie, *A Biblical Cyclopaedia: Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments* (London, Glasgow: Bell and Bain Publisher, 1868), 69.

¹⁶ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 80.

¹⁷ Katherine Sakenfield, *Ruth*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999), 34.

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 11: 13-15.

The Israelites needed to continue in God's laws and statutes to be blessed. This was a theme that ran throughout the scripture.

In verse 2 of Ruth chapter 1, Elimelech takes his wife, Naomi, and sons Chillion and Mahlon, Ephrathites of Bethlehem, and moved them to Moab.¹⁹ Moab's location was on the east side of the Dead Sea opposite Judah.²⁰ Leaving Bethlehem was a significant statement. It was a departure from the land God has promised. Elimelech and the family were regressing back to the days of Israel's wilderness wanderings. This was a strong case for understanding a move to Moab as sinful and outside of God's perfect will.²¹

The Moab people were born out of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. "Both daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he *is* the father of the Moabites to this day."²² Encounters between the Moabites and Israelites were usually hostile or treacherous.

Verse 3 of chapter 1 states tragedy overtakes the family and Elimelech dies. The author gives no specific details of how Elimelech died or what was the cause of his death. Naomi is now left alone as a widow with two sons. In verse 4 of the chapter, Chillion and Mahlon marry Moabite women and reside in Moab for ten years. There is an interesting situation taking place which is possibly a direct result of Elimelech's death. The marriages of Orpah with Chillion and Ruth with Mahlon present morality issues.²³

¹⁹ Ruth 1: 1.

²⁰ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

²¹ Timothy L. Decker, *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary - Ruth 1:1-5: an exegetical and expositional proposal*, Volume 9, Issue 03. March 2010, 40, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/Decker_Ruth1.1-5.pdf.

²² Genesis 19: 36-37.

²³ Decker, *Conspectus*, 43.

These two Ephrathite men married Moabite women. Israelites were warned not to intermarry with foreigners. “You shall not make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son or take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods”²⁴ God considered the Moabites to be heathens and impure. An act of disobedience which was strictly forbidden by Hebrew law. Verse 5 states, “Mahlon and Chilion also died.”²⁵ Naomi was a widow with two dead sons. Neither Ruth or Orpah had children by their husbands. The women are all widows without children. “Childlessness brought about the withering of one’s self and the destruction of one’s family.”²⁶

Cultural and Social Setting

Israelites were mandated to assist the widows, orphans, and the elderly. Naomi was destitute without a husband, sons, or family to take care of her. Naomi recommends that Ruth go home to her family. Ruth’s love and dedication to Naomi did not allow her to abandon her. Ruth makes an oath and pledges her loyalty to Naomi in verses 15 and 16: “for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.” According to the Law of Moses in the Hebrew culture, provision was to be made on behalf of those that were needy: “The Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the

²⁴ Deuteronomy 7: 3- 4.

²⁵ Ruth 1: 5.

²⁶ Michele Klein, *A Time to be Born* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 17.

fatherless and the widow who *are* within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”²⁷

The Mosaic Law had many conditions about the care of groups that needed help. The cultural setting dealt specifically with the importance of family. Widows, immigrants, and orphans were very defenseless and helpless in biblical times. Widowed women like Naomi would eventually become impoverished, with some becoming beggars or even prostitutes.

The culture and social structure forbade women to own property or have business dealings. “They weren’t considered capable since their education was limited to household matters: cooking, sewing, and carrying water”²⁸ Ruth’s and Naomi’s story was at the time of transition from nomadic to agricultural life. Life was simple, and the constraints of civilization were limited, and harvesting was carried on with primitive implements.²⁹ Customs and cultures for Ruth, a Moabite woman, were different from Naomi’s’ and the Israelite people. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh as the tribal God, while Yahweh was the God of Israel. “Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh.”³⁰ “Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.”³¹

²⁷ Deuteronomy 14: 29.

²⁸ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 82.

²⁹ I. G. Matthews, “Expository Studies in the Old Testament: XI. Ruth and Samuel,” *The Biblical World* 30, no. 5 (1907): 361-368.

³⁰ Numbers 21: 29.

³¹ 1 Kings 11:7.

The Israelites are monotheistic and believed in one all-powerful God. Thus to conform to the religious customs of the people would be only the natural thing for one coming into the bounds of Judah.³² Ruth was not an Israelite and had no obligation to care for Naomi or worship her God. Widows could ask the relative of their deceased husband to marry or care for them. It is evident that probably would not happen due to Naomi's age.

Compassion, generosity, and assistance were God's law. "Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do"³³ The farmers were to leave the outside area of the fields and leave that which falls on the ground. God decreed that one-tenth of the yearly harvest be donated and held for distribution to the poor. Charity was God's law, and all the poor were to share in the blessings.

Major Themes of the Text

Death, family, gender, grief and loyalty are the major themes of Ruth chapter 1. Death is a constant visitor in verses 3 to 5. Naomi's husband Elimelech dies in verse 3. By the time the story gets to verse 5, both sons Chilion and Mahlon also die and leave wives: Orpah and Ruth. Some scholars believe the deaths were because of disobedience to God for intermingling with the Moab people and marrying Moab women. The text does not give a reason for the death of these men.

³² Matthews, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament: XI. Ruth and Samuel," 362.

³³ Deuteronomy 15: 10.

Grieving Naomi acknowledges the love and help Orpah and Ruth displayed during her suffering over the loss of both sons and her husband. In verse 6, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, the place that was home to her and her deceased family. She had heard that God made provision and had given them food again. It is evident Naomi did not want to miss out on the blessing God was bestowing upon the people.

The family bond in the text is both extended and biological and a major theme in this story. In verses 7, Naomi leaves with Ruth and Orpah, and they set out on their way back to Bethlehem-Judah. Naomi pleads with them in verses 8 and 9 to go home to their Mother's house. In the request for them to leave, Naomi acknowledges their love and help during her suffering and grief.

Typically, childless widows like Ruth and Orpah return to their parents' home with the expectation of remarrying.³⁴ They wept as Naomi prayed for them to find rest and be at peace with a new husband. In their culture marriage was considered the only respectable way women found social and economic security.³⁵

Gender is another major theme. "With the husband and son's gone, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth become the story's principal characters."³⁶ Orpah leaves and three is now reduced to a pair without a patriarch or men to provide for their needs. In this era and culture, a woman's life was predetermined based on Mosaic Law, societal, and

³⁴ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 80.

³⁵ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

³⁶ Andrew Davis, "The Literary Effect of Gender Discourse in the Book of Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3: 495-513, accessed March 15, 2017, *ALTA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.

cultural norms. There are many serious issues as the women make decisions regarding their future. Naomi and Ruth's relationship as family and friends is a struggle for survival in a patriarchal society.³⁷

Loyalty is at the forefront of this relationship in verses 10-12 and begins to unfold as the central setting of God's plan for Naomi and Ruth. Naomi is aware that she is unable to provide her daughters-in-law with husbands or the security they desperately need. She was an old woman most likely barren due to her age. Her life has left her bitter and blaming God for the negative circumstances. Naomi says to them, "it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!"

In verse 14, "Naomi's arguments prevailed with Orpah, who returned to her people and her gods, but Ruth clave unto her."³⁸ In verses 15-17, Ruth was not bound to remain with Naomi. However, her words so expressively and powerful were more than a proclamation; it was a decree of solidarity. "May the Lord do this and so, is the standard form of swearing and oath."³⁹ In verse 18, Naomi realized there was no turning Ruth away even in death. When Ruth's determination prevailed, Naomi knew there was no more disagreeing, and they were bonded together for life. Naomi was silent, and they continued on their journey to Bethlehem.

³⁷ Davis, "The Literary Effect of Gender Discourse in the Book of Ruth.," 495-513.

³⁸ Robert Jamieson, Andrew Robert Fausset, and David Brown. *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*. Vol. 2 (New York, NY: S. S. Scranton & Company, 1871), 174.

³⁹ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

Word Study

The names and words in the story of Ruth chapter 1 have symbolic meanings. The etymological search of these words will provide a better understanding. The writer's objective is to determine the meaning of where the word originated and its meanings in the era of Ruth in the bible. "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. A certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, left to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons" (Ruth 1:1-2).

"Judges" means to act as lawgiver or judge or governor.⁴⁰ As previously discussed in this paper, it was a time when people did what was right in their own eyes. There was a famine in the land. "Famine" is a time of hunger and extreme scarcity of food.⁴¹ According to Mark Allen Powell, the definition of Bethlehem means "House of Bread."⁴² The irony is that the House of Bread, Bethlehem was in extreme famine and drought. "Fourth son born to Jacob by Leah, was named Judah, meaning "praise."⁴³ There was no bread in Bethlehem, and no reason to praise in Judah.

In Ruth chapter 1, the husband's name was Elimelech; the wife's name was Naomi; the names of the sons are Mahlon and Chilion (who were Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah). They went to the country of Moab and stayed there. "Elimelech," the husband's name, means "My God is King," during an era when Israel had no king. The

⁴⁰ Blue Letter Bible, "Lexicon," *Strong's H8199*, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H8199&t=NKJV>.

⁴¹ Merriam-Webster, "Famine," Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/famine>.

⁴² Mark A. Powell, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary: Abridged Edition* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2009), 43.

⁴³ Walter A. Ewell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Judah (Person)," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Volumes 1 & 2, A-Z (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1227.

sons, “Chilion” and “Mahlon” names are Hebrew words for “diseased” and “perishing.” Naomi’s name meant “sweet and pleasant” in contrast to the hardships she would encounter in her life.⁴⁴ The names were paradoxical due to the situation that was taking place in their lives. There is a powerful contextual connection between the famine and the ongoing misfortune in this family.

The son’s wives were women of “Moab” meaning “of his father.”⁴⁵ Chilion’s wife was named Orpah, meaning gazelle; and Mahlon’s wife was Ruth, meaning “faithful, trustworthy, faithfulness, faith, and truth.”⁴⁶ In this chapter, it is evident that the name fits Ruth perfectly based on her faithfulness and trust in Naomi.

In verse 6, the word “return” is used three times, and in the entire chapter return is used twelve times. The word return is translated from the Hebrew word “shub” and means “go back” or “turn back.”⁴⁷ The word can also mean they turned from God and went to live in a forbidden land with forbidden people. Verses 8 and 9, according to Ruth Farmer’s, “Mother’s House” context, deals specifically as related to arranged marriages.⁴⁸ Marriage was symbolic to respectability for women in those times.

Naomi’s prayer, “may the LORD deal kindly with you” means kindness. It is derived from the Hebrew word *khesed* and has more theological significance than the

⁴⁴ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

⁴⁵ StudyLight.org, *Old Testament Hebrew Lexical Dictionary*, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/hebrew/4124.html>.

⁴⁶ StudyLight.org, *Old Testament Hebrew Lexical Dictionary*, 6204, 529.

⁴⁷ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

⁴⁸ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

word kindness and is used in describing God's unmerited favor. It also makes doing kindness and acts of loyalty much greater than the Law requires.⁴⁹

In Ruth verses 11-13, Naomi questions her daughters-in-law and wants to know it is not logical for them to stay around. She may never get another husband and is unable to bear children. Naomi's desire for them is "hope" and "security." "Hope" is "to want something to happen or be true" and "security" is "freedom from fear, anxiety, and danger."⁵⁰ In verse 13, it is apparent that Naomi is becoming bitter because of what has transpired in her life. "Bitter" is the Hebrew word *Qal*. It means "distressed" or "resentful."⁵¹

The text in verse 14 shows that Orpah leaves and Naomi leaves to return to Moab. Ruth "clings," "cleaves", and "remains close" to Naomi. Verse 17, "May the Lord do thus and so to me and more so as well," is typically used to "swear an oath." In verses 20, Naomi changes her name to "Mara" it means *bitterness* because the Lord had afflicted her.

The chapter closes with Naomi and Ruth returning to Bethlehem. It was the perfect time at the beginning of the barley harvest. Naomi considered her times ahead were difficult. Ruth was with her to the end, and God was in control.

⁴⁹ Farmer, *Introduction to Ruth*, 385.

⁵⁰ Merriam-Webster, "Hope and Security," Merriam-Webster, Inc.

⁵¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles Briggs, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Edited by Richard Whitaker, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, accessed March 18, 2017, Logos Research Systems.

Conclusion

In this pericope, Naomi in verse. 6 is coping with immense problems. She is a woman who had suffered a significant loss: the death of her spouse and both sons. Naomi was in a land that was forbidden by God for Hebrew to dwell or mingle with the people. Hardship and destitution caused her to change her name to “Mara.”

How often are the women living in the 21st century facing many of the same problems and hardships that Naomi and Ruth faced? The story is ageless and transcends millenniums and eras. Women have endured suffering, pain, abuse, poverty, lack of education and resources through history.

Faith and prayer are the catalysts that can change any situation on earth. This is evidential based on the grace and mercy of God who desires the best for his people. Naomi and Ruth could have easily turned away from God based on the grief and suffering the endured. The death of a spouse often creates financial hardship, and some women may have the proclivity to turn to work, alcohol, drugs, or a partner that may be physically abusive, verbally abusive or both. Other women turn to the “church” instead of God to fulfill voids. Ultimately, this lead for many to occasions of abusive interactions with “pastors, bishops, apostles” or other clergy members.

The goal of this empowerment project is to assist women by providing them with the tools they need to be victorious. Training women to overcome adversity and abuse with the 3C model of Christ, Compassion, Church and Empowerment programs in West Las Vegas, Sin City, can serve as a conduit for this.

Women are a powerful presence in the church and community. What seems to be the problems is not knowing their value or worth, self-esteem, problems, and lack of

direction. Jealousy and envy are also problems women have that are rooted in the outlined issues..

The empowerment project will be instrumental in helping women to overcome and move past many of these issues. Women who have clear vision and understand their purpose can accomplish anything they put their mind to do. Naomi and Ruth empowered each other. Faith is a powerful tool and can move the biggest mountains. It was evident in the days of Ruth and Naomi, and it is still evident today. The book of Ruth is clear regarding when faith is lost, and people have no vision.

God knows one's destiny, and also the path that is required to achieve it. It is not the path we would usually take, and it is not the path Naomi and Ruth would have taken if asked. However, God can bring blessing out of bad times and make miracles out of misfortune.

The project "3C model of Christ, Compassion, Church, and Empowerment" will train women. By providing life skills, behavior modification, domestic violence and substance abuse classes, it will promote and provide the incentives needed to help women work toward positive change. With the right mentoring, faith building, and facilitators, the women who partake in the project will be unstoppable in Christ. Jesus took the wounded, marginalized, hurting, and rejected people and used them to change the world. Jesus loved women, helped them, advocated on their behalf, empowered them and gave them a voice. This project will model Christ, the compassion that was shown to women, and the impact they had on the church and community.

New Testament

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. However, the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that, you spoke truly.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4: 14-26).

Literary Setting

How did it feel for this Samaritan woman to be empowered by Jesus? It must have been the highlight of her day or maybe even her life. Jesus empowered this woman, and she spoke on his behalf. Taking a backward glance to the Old Testament writings, Naomi used her influence to empower Ruth, while God empowered and directed them both. To live an empowered life for Jesus is pretty much what all Christians aspire to do. The Samaritan woman is unique and bold in character. Engaging a Jewish man in a conversation was unheard of for a Samaritan woman during this time in history. “Jesus in Samaria forms the heart of the story and displays many of John’s literary traits, wordplay, irony, and metaphor and provides the setting.”⁵²

⁵² Gail O’Day, “Introduction to John,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1914.

The main literary structure and genre of the text in this particular writing can be considered a prose narrative. The writing is in the ordinary language of the era and the story of Jesus and the woman at the well is not poetic. It is inferred that the Apostle John is the author of the book. He is the extradiegetic narrator, speaking in the third person and is not a part of the story. 'It is, of course extremely difficult to determine the precise intent of any author at the time of his writing.'⁵³ John is conveying his viewpoint from the dialogue between Jesus and an unnamed woman either unequivocally or through the information of other individuals. John's Gospel belongs to the Greco-Roman genre.⁵⁴ The gospel of John combines the developments of Jesus, and the beloved Apostle John is his interpreter.⁵⁵

John the writer is narrating a story about an unnamed Samaritan woman who has an encounter with Jesus at a well. This conversation is the longest conversation recorded in the bible that Jesus had with an individual outside of the disciples. The dialogue extends over nineteen verses. Negative conclusions have been drawn about this woman throughout history. Numerous relevant facts have been missed in this story and also a grave misrepresentation and a devaluation of the Samaritan woman has been made. "This lady is not ignorant and base, nor is she the town prostitute. Rather, the Samaritan woman is an informed, politically savvy person to whom people listen when she speaks."⁵⁶ The individuals in the place where she lived heard and listened to her witness and testimony about the man who professed to be the Messiah. Some of the people went to locate him

⁵³ Longnecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 105.

⁵⁴ Bart D. Erhman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 155.

⁵⁵ Gerd Theissen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 145.

⁵⁶ Jo Ann Davidson, "John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1: 159-168. (Andrews University Press, 2005), accessed March 25, 2017, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.bing.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2913&context=auss>.

so they could also hear his words. It is evident that Jesus did not regard this woman with disdain or disparagement.

“To this one solitary woman, Jesus proclaimed the fundamental issues of Christian theology and worship, making his most profound theological statement on true worship to this supposedly ignorant woman.”⁵⁷ The unnamed woman at the well is trusted with the ministry of declaring Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one. The disciples questioned Jesus upon their return as to why he was having a conversation with a Samaritan woman. Apparently, the disciples underestimated the value and ability of this empowered woman to speak and proclaim Jesus’ message.

The Messiah went outside of the normal paradigms set by the religious leaders of the time. “In talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus broke conventions in the freedom with which he related to this woman, whom he would have scorned had he followed the conventions of his day.”⁵⁸ The woman knew the protocol of that era and understood the code of behavior between Jews and Samaritans. Because of the inequality between the Jews and Samaritans, they had never heard Jesus’ message of love and inclusivity. “While insulating faith from the onslaughts and fluctuations of criticism, it also isolates faith from the world of human experience and so cuts the cord of communication that links the church with the world it is endeavoring to address”⁵⁹

In John 4:1-6, there is a transition of Jesus leaving Judea to return to Galilee. Verses 4-6 provide the backdrop of the place and time since contact with Samaritans was

⁵⁷ Davidson, “John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman,” 167.

⁵⁸ David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends and Discerning Directions in Today’s Theological Landscape* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 251.

⁵⁹ Longnecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 39.

usually avoided. Verses 7-26 show the woman and Jesus having open dialogue regarding water from the well and the living water that the Messiah provides; it ends with the woman acknowledging Jesus as a prophet and Messiah. She then spreads the message about Jesus in the city. The Johannine message and theology is hope for their present situation and future possibilities for the people through the message and acceptance to Jesus.

Historical Setting

John's Gospel is believed to be written sometime in the latter part of the first century. Around 90 AD is what most bible scholars and experts believe.⁶⁰ The book of John and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well clearly have a historical and a biographical quality. The identification of the temple on Gerizim, which had been destroyed, means that the Jerusalem temple had also been destroyed.⁶¹ There is no human genealogy in John; rather, the focus is primarily on the deity of Jesus.

Women play an intricate role in John's Gospel. The historical and cultural aspect that men did not speak to women was major during this time. This makes the situation more intriguing. Jesus, a Jewish Rabbi man, was talking with a Samaritan woman, which was out of order and shameful. Historically boundaries were outlined, and the Jews were accepted as God's chosen people, while the Samaritans were cast offs and rejected. It is obvious that men did not have a monopoly on witness and discipleship. John narrates a

⁶⁰ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 348.

⁶¹ Theissen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 147.

faith world that would not exist without this woman's participation.⁶² When God saw the woman seeking truth, there was no condemnation for her honesty, kindness and compassion.

Jesus departs Jerusalem and decides to travel back to his home in Galilee, a region that is now northern Israel.⁶³ He changes direction and felt the need to go through Samaria. No reason is given for the change in Verse 4. Jesus simply says he needs to go to Samaria. The city of Samaria and the Samaritans came about because of King Omri.

Omri became king over Israel and reigned twelve years. Six years he reigned in Tirzah. And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill.⁶⁴

Samaritans were considered to be foreigners. They were brought to the land by the Assyrians about seven centuries prior. Samaritans believed in Judaism but mixed it with paganism and combined the religion with a mixture of different beliefs which made syncretic. They were contemptible to the Jews and ostracized.

Upon entering Samaria at midday about twelve noon, Jesus' location is at Jacob's well in a city named called Sychar. The well was the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph in Genesis.⁶⁵ "The well is more than 100 feet deep today, but in AD 670 the well was measured at 240 feet deep."⁶⁶ In verse 7 of Chapter 4, Jesus meets and engages

⁶² Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1998), 382.

⁶³ O'Day, "Introduction to John," 1914.

⁶⁴ 1 Kings 16: 23-24.

⁶⁵ John 4: 5.

⁶⁶ Miller, *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, 353.

the Samaritan woman by asking her for a drink of water. Some scholars view, “Jesus and the Samaritan woman as a Johannine variation on an Old Testament betrothal story.”⁶⁷

This was symbolic to Jacob meeting his wife Rachael at the well. “The well, in Old Testament times, was the place of courtship”⁶⁸

In chapter 4 verse 14, Jesus is telling the Samaritan woman that the water drawn from Jacob’s well is a temporary thirst quencher. The water he offers is spiritual and eternal. Jesus has driven the conversation while the woman reacted to his words. She requested living water from Jesus. In verses 16-17, Jesus changes the subject and addressed her marital status. Jesus had other intentions and was seeking more than an earthly marriage.

Indeed, the woman's marital history echoes that of the Samaritans as described in 2 Kings 17:30-32. In their syncretism, the Samaritans were said to have worshiped the gods of five other nations. Josephus echoes this commonly-held assumption in his *Antiquities*, where he notes that the Samaritans incorporated the gods of five other countries, thus provoking the Most High God to anger and wrath.⁶⁹

The woman at the well can be considered as a historical leader who is also the representative and symbol for the Samaritan people. It was clear none of the five men she married were able to provide the intimacy and satisfaction she desired. The pagan syncretic worship was not able to fulfill her need. In verses 19-26 in Chapter 4, the

⁶⁷ Peter J. Scaer, 2003. "Jesus and the woman at the well: where mission meets worship." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67, no. 1: 3-18, accessed April 9, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁶⁸ Scaer, "Jesus and the woman at the well: where mission meets worship," 6.

⁶⁹ Scaer, "Jesus and the woman at the well: where mission meets worship," 6.

unnamed woman acknowledged Jesus as a prophet.⁷⁰ She became the chosen representative of the Samaritan people. Only Jesus could satisfy her longing. Only Jesus could provide living water. Only Jesus could serve as her true bridegroom.⁷¹

Cultural and Social Setting

It was during the Roman Greco era that the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman took place. Women were a part of a very patriarchal society and were considered to be subservient to men. Economic security and status were dominated by male culture and philosophy. “Status was not only shaped by the prevalent culture of the ruling empire, but also was strongly influenced by religious norms and expectations.”⁷² The Hebrew people held family as a major concern and of foremost importance.

“In the rabbinic ideal, women are not to be found in the marketplace, where the risk to their chastity was considered enormous. Women were looked upon as inferior.”⁷³ Jesus’s actions and conversation in chapter 4 verses 13-15 astonished even the woman, even to the disapproval of the culture and the disciples when they witnessed him talking with this so-called lowly woman. According to M. Scott, “the Rabbinic writers believed that women should neither be taught theology nor engage in discussion of it with men; this woman is seen to know something and prepared to discuss it openly with a male

⁷⁰ Jason S. Sturdevant, 2015. *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 162; Novum Testamentum / Supplements, 162. Leiden u.a.: Brill, accessed April 8, 2017, <http://swbplus.bsz-bw.de/bsz44569145Xinh.htm>.

⁷¹ Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos*.

⁷² Svetlana Renee Papazov, “The Place of Women in the Graeco-Roman World,” *Enrichment Journal*, Fall (2010): 1-12. accessed April 12, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201004_000_christian_wo_men.cfm.

⁷³ Papazov, “The Place of Women in the Graeco-Roman World.”

Jew.”⁷⁴ Jesus knew her history and addressed it as a way to get her attention. Verses 16-18 in Chapter 4 expresses Jesus’ attitudes and action toward women. Widowed Jewish women could marry the brother of her deceased husband. Multiple marriages for the women were not an uncommon practice. Jewish women, when widowed, would frequently remarry.⁷⁵

The words and teaching of Jesus elevated women’s status in this time of gender bias.

The spring of living waters that this Son of Man brought to men and women alike, causing the reassessment and profound alteration of all philosophical systems, and all theological beliefs. The validity of the ‘natural’ inferiority of women, and their subordinate place in society was duly challenged and exposed as false.⁷⁶

Jesus’ actions and proselytization opposed every past doctrine or writing in oral or traditional law that delineated women as inferior within society. They were equal to their male counterparts academically, spiritually, and ethically. Jesus was beyond compassionate and was not concerned with the social and cultural norms of the era. He defied the oppressive systems against women and broke every rule that was set in place. Samaritans were considered as dogs; she was a woman; and he was addressing her openly for everyone to observe.

The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: “He who talks with a woman in public brings evil upon himself. Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus’ day taught one is

⁷⁴ Robert Gordon Maccini, 1994. "A Reassessment of the Woman at the Well in John 4 in Light of the Samaritan Context," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 53, 35-46. accessed April 12, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁷⁵ Papazov, “The Place of Women in the Graeco-Roman World.”

⁷⁶ Papazov, “The Place of Women in the Graeco-Roman World.”

not so much as to greet a woman.”⁷⁷ Jesus was not concerned with the rabbinical order of the times. He was concerned with the welfare of women. The woman was amazed at this Rabbi, Messiah, and Prophet that never looked down on her, or patronized her.

Major Themes of the Text

Race, salvation, eternal life, truth, and faith in this story are the major themes in the gospel of John and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus’ message of salvation is to a woman who had been ostracized and reduced to coming to the well at the sixth hour after the other women had left. In John chapter four verses 13-14, Jesus proclaims to the Samaritan woman that she can partake in God’s salvation and have everlasting life. In this message, Jesus is offering her eternal life. Whoever drinks of the natural water will thirst again. The spiritual water Jesus gives will have eternal and everlasting life. In these verses, Jesus deals with numerous issues that are specific to women and the Samaritan people. The living water, salvation, and eternal life all destroy the Samaritan syncretic pagan worship. The rabbi Jesus speaking to a woman shatters the ideology of Jews not engaging in conversation with Samaritans. “The holy, Jewish man reaches out to a sinful, Samaritan, woman. He breaks down barriers of holiness, ethnicity, gender, and religion by offering the gift of salvation to the fallen Samaritan woman. He is, indeed, the Savior of the world.”⁷⁸

In verses 16-19 of chapter 4, Jesus does not delay in speaking to the woman about her sin. Immediately, in verse 16 when she is told to go fetch her husband, it is evident

⁷⁷ Papazov, “The Place of Women in the Graeco-Roman World.”

⁷⁸ Scaer, “Jesus and the woman at the well: where mission meets worship,” 6.

Jesus knows her life and her heart. In verse 17, the woman makes no excuses or lies about her life or marital status. She speaks the truth and Jesus commends her on the answer. Truth is a major theme in this story, and she perceived that Jesus was a prophet. God revealed truth and gave her insight about Jesus.

It is obvious the Samaritan woman was on a quest for love. She had been married five times, and the man she now lived with was not her husband. Love is often equated with companionship, sex, and money. Jesus shows agape love and his message was one of inclusivity. Those who had been considered as “dogs” were now counted in the number with the chosen people of God: the Jews.

The story is full of symbolism; and Jesus is the Messiah, the one who is above and greater than Jacob. When Jesus encounters the woman and begins a dialogue, it is apparent she has no faith and is unable to comprehend what is being told. In verses 19-25, she believes Jesus to be a prophet. Worship becomes the central discussion. “The Samaritans adhered strictly to the Pentateuch.”⁷⁹ Where the Samaritans worshipped and the Jews place of worship were separate. The woman did not know the magnitude of her encounter with Jesus. “She is responding with categories that come from her own religious and cultural circumstances and displays a partial faith.”⁸⁰ An amazing fact of this story and verse is she had more revelation and insight into who Jesus was than Nicodemus, a Rabbi in chapter three, and others Jesus had encountered. In verses 25-26, the proclaimed messiah was coming, and Jesus immediately told her: “I am he who is

⁷⁹ Maccini, “A Reassessment of the Woman at the Well in John 4 in Light of the Samaritan Context.”

⁸⁰ R. Jackson Painter, “Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study,” by Francis Maloney, *Religious Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (March 2015):27, accessed April 12, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

speaking to you.” The Johannine eschatology holds present hopes and future expectations together through the incarnate presence of God in Jesus”⁸¹

Word Study

The etymological and ontological study of the words in this chapter will help to provide a better understanding of the context and time that these occurrences take place. “Sychar” has been identified with ‘Askar, a small Samaritan town on the southern base of Ebal, about a mile to the north of Jacob’s well.”⁸² The place where Jesus rested tired from the journey from Jerusalem was at Jacobs Well.

One of the few sites in Palestine where there is no dispute. It was dug by Jacob in the ‘parcel of ground’ which he purchased from the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19). It is about 9 feet in diameter and about 75 feet in depth.⁸³

Samaritans was a sect of Jews that mixed monotheism with pagan religion. “It was the name given to the new and mixed inhabitants whom Esarhaddon (B.C. 677), the king of Assyria, brought from Babylon and other places and settled in the cities of Samaria⁸⁴ The Samaritans and Jews were enemies. The hostility and enmity between them had lasted into Jesus’ time. The Samaritans and Jews basically had interaction few interactions.

⁸¹ O’Day, “Introduction to John,” 1915.

⁸² M. G. Easton, (1893). *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1993), accessed April 12, 2017, Google Scholar.

⁸³ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

⁸⁴ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

The words “eternal life” or “everlasting life” are found throughout the New Testament. It is the final reward and glory that the children of God enter into a sabbath of rest. “It is connected with the eternal life beyond this life and the endless life of the future, and the happy future of the saints in heaven.”⁸⁵ Jesus is telling the woman salvation and eternal life is available to her through him.

The word “husband” has a different context in this pericope. It infers, since the woman had been married so many times, they were most likely Levirate marriages. The word “Levirate” (Law) comes from the Latin word *levis*, meaning “a husband’s brother.” Moses established the custom that when an Hebrew passed away without any problems or trouble, it was the duty of the brother to marry the deceased brothers widow. The law was established for a purpose of producing a son from the marriage. “The objective and reason were to raise up seed to the departed brother.”⁸⁶ This may have been a good reason why the Samaritan woman had been married so many times. The text does not, however, give reason or indication why there were multiple marriages in her life. So much like the story of Ruth and Naomi when Chilion and Mahlon died, Naomi had no other sons to marry Orpah and Ruth; and she was too old to bear more sons. The Samaritan woman’s multiple marriage may have been based on her obedience to the Levirate Law.

“Spirit,” “truth,” and “worship” are other key words found in the text. “Spirit is translated from the Hebrew word, *ruah*, and the Greek word, *pneuma*.”⁸⁷ The meaning of

⁸⁵ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

⁸⁶ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

⁸⁷ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

the word is “breath” or “wind.” It also means man’s immortal soul and how man is set apart from other creatures. The word “truth” is used in many contexts in the scriptures. Lies and falsehoods are the opposite of truth, which means “fidelity” or “truthfulness.” The doctrine of Christ is called “the truth of the gospel. Our Lord says of himself, “I am the way, and the truth” (John 14:6).⁸⁸ “Worship” is reverence offered to God. “Worship is homage rendered to God, which is sinful and idolatry to render to any created being.”⁸⁹

In verse 25-26 of chapter 4, the Samaritan woman refers to Jesus as the Messiah.

The word Messiah is mentioned thirty-nine times in the Old Testament.

The expectations of the Jews were thus kept alive from generation to generation, till the ‘fullness of the times,’ when Messiah came, ‘made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.’ In him all these ancient prophecies have their fulfilment. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the great Deliverer who was to come.⁹⁰

It is evident that through Godly revelation the woman knew Jesus was the Messiah. The story concludes with Jesus telling the woman who he was and using one of the great historical “I am sayings.” Jesus’ response to the woman was look no further, the Messiah is here and I am he. Jesus was considered as the anointed one that was to save the people.

Conclusion

The women that have been highlighted in this paper are prime examples of the treatment and mistreatment from antiquity and still in the 21st century. Abuse in any form

⁸⁸ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

⁸⁹ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

⁹⁰ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*.

delivers negative consequences for women. Abuse against women is very prevalent and, in many cases, an outright blatant problem. Maltreatment is unacceptable in our African American communities, especially when it is the women who are holding the homes together as single parents. It is the women who show up and fill up the black churches on Sunday mornings. They support their churches with creased and folded one, five, ten, and twenty-dollar bills. Yet, women are not permitted to serve, preach, and advance in upper levels of leadership in many churches and communities.

My project will work towards creating a different dynamic in the community that will empower women and provide a self-help program to give them tools to help them advance. So many women suffer from depression and self-esteem issues that can be very easily overcome by training, self-affirmations, and support groups. Women are strong until they become weak and turn to other vices that cause them more distress.

Second Baptist Church and the Bridge of Faith Outreach, Inc., will seek out new and innovative programs that will combat and empower women to become their best selves. This will be accomplished by helping the women grow and become more secure in their abilities and to leave behind the vices of substance abuse, intimate partner abuse, and clergy abuses. The ultimate goal is not to cause more hardship for the women by telling them they have to leave the present situations. Our goal is to provide the tools and create visions so they can see clearly a better path and future for themselves and their children.

Every situation that has been outlined in this paper to help women overcome adversity has not been without personal struggle, achievement and accomplishment. African American women have endured so much pain for centuries. It is high time that

they become empowered to reach the highest heights they can even in the middle of adversity.

According to Vashti McKenzie, “As daughters of the well will need faith to keep focused on the journey, until you grow and begin to celebrate all the women inside.”⁹¹ The 3C model of Christ, Compassion, and Church to overcome abuse and adversity in Las Vegas, Sin City, is all about empowering women. The silent suffering and pain women have dealt with is because many believed they were all alone without help. God is on the side of these women waiting and willing to empower them to perform great exploits on his behalf. Just as he used Ruth, a non-Jewish woman, and the Samaritan woman considered to be a “dog,” God can use any other woman. “The ongoing challenges of our lives do not abate even while we are on the journey to the well. Women have been hit hard and run over and pushed to the side like roadkill.”⁹² There is still hope for change and life.

Women are significant and special to God. They should also be special to their children, spouses, family, jobs, churches, community, and the world where they live. In the West Las Vegas community, greater strides will be taken to assist women in crisis and hardship. That means not just giving out food, and clothes, but to find out what their real and serious issues are and develop a plan of action to overcome them. This may appear to be a lot of work and impossible to accomplish. There will be much to overcome

⁹¹ Vashti McKenzie, *Journey to the Well* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), accessed April 13, 2017, Google Scholar.

⁹² McKenzie, *Journey to the Well*.

when dealing with women. But with God, all things are possible. The West Las Vegas Community will be an asset and supportive of this project.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

History is an important aspect of life. Historical facts and information help us to understand the past, the present, and potentially the future. Finding the truth in stories that have been passed down over generations is a continuous debate among those who attempt to create a scholarly synthesis. Cultural revolution and the various actions taken by society acknowledge there is no absolute truth. What we can hope for is objectivity and examination of historical information without personal or political agendas attached to outcomes. “As you begin to think about historical questions, you will find that your search will require you to explore a wide variety of sources.”¹

When we neglect to tell our history, we often forget our history. Recounting the events of history can cause one to be joyful, painful, angry, sorrowful, and fearful and may evoke many other emotions. However, it is important that we respect history and communicate the facts in great detail. Taking a closer look at the available facts, statistics, and evidence available is necessary to dispel covert suppositions. If the facts and information are available, it can provide the evidence needed to substantiate the validity of an ancient belief or occurrence. History has a profound effect on the person who encounters specific details or artifacts. There is no getting around or away from

¹ Mary L. Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martins Publisher, 2010), 8.

history or the situations and circumstances of the past. One thing history can and will do is provoke an emotional response of ethos or pathos in every individual encounter.

Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker (who will be referred to collectively in this section as Truth, Tubman and Walker) impacted society, made social and economic changes, and challenged cultural norms. They defied, survived and thrived under oppressive systems during a time of slavery and post slavery. They were women who had to endure gender and racial discrimination, and misogynistic adversaries. These women were among those whose had their legal rights and basic human rights denied as a normal occurrence. Barriers were a part of their everyday lives; yet, it did not deter nor stop them from making a lasting imprint in history. Passion, perseverance, and pride provided them with the wherewithal to traverse through the Slavery Codes, Fugitive Slave Laws, and Jim Crow Laws. Every hurdle and barrier they encountered was a normal part of the lives of these three women.

Truth, Tubman and Walker were women who were able to navigate their way through tyrannical government systems successfully. It is most important to acknowledge the empowerment of women in our society and their awareness of human, civil, and constitutional rights. Historically, faith has always been a major part of African American culture, especially among women. Many historical situations and events have occurred that have not helped in the nurturing of women. In many “black” churches through the years, women have been sidelined, ostracized, and disregarded.

Within the black community in the United States, women have been some of the most enterprising agents of tradition. Recognition of the variety of strong traditions that black women have established in the religious and secular affairs of their community have been obscured by sociologist’s exclusive focus on family

roles and black women's deviation from patriarchal expectations in a sexist and racist society.²

Women have had to take on multiple roles and positions in the home and community due to the absence of male role models and father figures.

As we search through our historical records and oral traditions, there are disturbing aspects of being both black and female that are unforgettable. There may be the tendency and desire to forget these situations. Every problem, hardship, discrimination, suffering, racism, and oppression has been an intricate piece of the puzzle that has helped in the liberation of black women. Some people believe these issues of the past would be better forgotten instead of being remembered.

One distinct fact from our history as African American women that needs to be reclaimed is God has been empowering and using women as change agents in their communities and nations from the beginning of time. It is factual that women have faith in God that can move mountains and overcome adversity and opposition. Women know how to petition and travail in prayer to move God through compassion, mourning, and humility. They believed God's Word without wavering.

My project is about women's empowerment. This paper will focus on a movement of women who excelled, were empowered, and excellent examples during slavery or shortly thereafter. The era is the mid-1840s to the early 1900s. Truth, Tubman and Walker were women who overcame adversity despite the hardships and suffering they encountered and endured. These were women who did not allow the circumstances, slavery, prejudice or any negative issues concerning race or gender to hinder their

² Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., eds., *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 629, 630, accessed April 26, 2017, Google Scholar.

success. Three great historical women – Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker – are highlighted in this paper.

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was part of an era that was totally engrossed in human bondage. She lived and became one of the most famous women of the nineteenth century. Despite the unending obstacles, Isabella, aka Sojourner Truth, became an abolitionist as well as a civil rights and women's advocate and activist. She was a proud woman that stood close to six feet tall and was very courageous during the worst times in the history of the United States.

She was born Isabella Baumfree, a slave in 1797 in Ulster County, New York. Her first owner was Charles Hardenbergh.³ The chronological history of Isabella Baumfree's life is one that is typical of slaves during that particular era. She was sold several times to different slave owners. The list of her owners include John Kneeley in Kingston New York, Martinus Schryver in Port Ewen, also in Kingston, New York, and John Dumont in New Paltz, New York. She walked away from Dumont and ended up on the plantation as the slave of Isaac Van Wagenen in Bloomington, New York. From 1797 until 1827 she lived on seven different plantations with different owners.⁴

The Nealy plantation was where she suffered the most inhumane treatment by Dutch immigrants who were slave owners. Mrs. Nealy did not speak English; miscommunication and misunderstanding resulted in Isabella being beaten for simple

³ Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1993), xiii.

⁴ Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, xiii.

mistakes. When the Nealys gave her orders she did not understand and could not carry out, John Nealy beat her. Many of the beatings were so cruel and harsh that he cut her body deeply.⁵ She was sold later to the Dumonts. On the Dumont plantation she married a slave name Thomas and had five children. All of her children and Thomas were sold. She married another slave name Robert who also was sold away from her.

It has been said about the African American woman; sorrow rolls right off her brow like so much rain. This suggests that African American women cope easily with the many losses in their lives. Coping with losses have been a constant in which, African Americans have a long history of knowing, from the separation from their African homeland to the selling of their children and loved ones during the time of slavery.⁶

Isabella was freed from slavery on July 4th, 1827 under the New York law that stated slaves born before 1799 were to be freed.⁷ After experiencing a religious conversion, Isabella became an itinerant preacher and in 1843 changed her name to Sojourner Truth.⁸ The name's meaning was a wandered and a person who spoke truth. Despite being illiterate, she was highly intelligent.

Sojourner Truth became an abolitionist and an advocate for women. She was the first black woman to win a legal case in a white court. Slave master Dumont had sold her son Peter and the new family took him to Alabama which was illegal in New York. After

⁵ Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 4.

⁶ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Theresa Snorton, *Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 43.

⁷ Suzanne Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 12.

⁸ National Park Service, "Sojourner Truth: Women's Rights," accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/sojourner-truth.htm>.

her four attempts to regain his freedom, Peter was returned. Sojourner Truth achieved her victory in court.⁹

Sojourner Truth became an itinerant evangelist and traveled through Connecticut and New York attending and setting up camp meetings of her own.

In 1844, she joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Northampton, Massachusetts. Founded by abolitionists, the organization supported a broad reform agenda including women's rights and pacifism. Members lived together on 500 acres as a self-sufficient community. Truth met some leading abolitionists at Northampton, including William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and David Ruggles.¹⁰

In 1850, the *Narrative*, a book about her life and memoirs, was written by Olive Gilbert as she narrated the events of life in slavery.¹¹ Sojourner Truth traveled around to religious meetings to sell her book and to talk to the people. “At the annual meeting of American Anti-Slavery Society in 1849, she spoke. She was the first colored speaker to venture into Anti-Slavery speaking.”¹² She also spoke at the Women’s Rights Convention in Massachusetts on October 23 and 24, in 1850.

Sojourner Truth began speaking in various venues on a regular basis. She is listed among the names of great abolitionist. She was included in a two-month Anti-slavery tour with, George Putnam, Abby Kelly, Steven Foster, and a host of other speakers.¹³ It

⁹ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 14.

¹⁰ Biography.com, “Sojourner Truth: Women’s Rights Activist, Activist, Civil Rights Activist,” accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.biography.com/people/sojourner-truth-9511284>.

¹¹ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 17.

¹² Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 17.

¹³ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 18.

was May 1851 that she traveled to Akron, Ohio to speak at a Women's Rights Conference where the speech which she is most famous for titled, "Ain't I a Woman," was delivered. The story was that white men heckled her because of her size, her big hands, and feet.

Reminding her fellow suffragists that African American women have suffered even more than their white counterparts, Truth bares her muscular arm and commands them with a voice 'like rolling thunder' to 'Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me, and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it, and bear de lash as well—and ain't I a woman?' For Truth, there was no separating the fight for women's rights from the fight to abolish slavery; every form of oppression must be eliminated.¹⁴

Men from the Democratic Party were attending the lectures and causing trouble by not allowing her to speak without interruptions. Some of them wanted to examine her breast, implying she was a man. "Truth staunchly refused and instead, uncovered her breast before them publicly, reminding them that "her breasts had suckled many a white babe."¹⁵

Sojourner Truth was a powerful abolitionist, women's right activist, and a political speaker. She spent her life traveling and giving speeches at convention, rallies, and political gatherings. Sojourner never stopped lecturing and continued to remain active and relevant. At one hundred and seven years old, Sojourner Truth lectured at a function for one and a half hours, sang hymns, and consistently helped women. She died on November 26, 1883, at her home in Battle Creek, Michigan.¹⁶ Sojourner Truth was the

¹⁴ Documenting the American South, "Narrative of Sojourner Truth: a Bondswoman of Olden Time," accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.docsouth.unc.edu/neh/truth75/summary.html>.

¹⁵ Documenting the American South, "Narrative of Sojourner Truth: a Bondswoman of Olden Time."

¹⁶ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 26.

beginning of an era that ushered in the “Women’s Empowerment Movement.” Other Women in this era were Harriet Tubman and Madame C.J. Walker. Truth, Tubman and Walker were African American women who were empowered by God and empowered others.

Harriet Tubman

The life of Harriet Tubman is one that has resonated throughout history for the fearless bravery she displayed. She was a woman who also defied white oppression, slavery, and ridicule during an era when African-American people were nothing more than chattel. Tubman was born Araminta “Minty” Ross on the Thompson Plantation in 1820 in Dorchester County, Maryland.¹⁷ She was the fifth child of Harriet “Rit” Green and Benjamin Ross; both were slaves who lived on different plantations.¹⁸ Slavery was prominent throughout the southern states. Living as a slave was the most inhumane, harshest, cruelest life beyond imagination.

Minty was a disabled person having received a debilitating blow to her head when she was about twelve-years old. The master, in a fit of anger, threw a weight cracking her skull.¹⁹ The injury caused severe damage, headaches, and suffering. Bouts of narcolepsy, or as referred to in those days as somnolence, were constant in her life. After her injury, there were strange occurrences of dreams and visions.

¹⁷ Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), xvi.

¹⁸ Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, xvi.

¹⁹ Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *The Extraordinary Life of Harriet, the Moses of her People* (New York, NY: J J Little & Company, 1901), 15.

God's Spirit was moving on Minty as a young girl, and she was not aware of the plan that would unfold for the future. Her childhood and early days were full of Minty being whipped and beaten for sleeping at night. Harsh treatment for not staying awake to rock the cradle of the mistress's baby was preparation for God's purpose in her life. The black child sat beside the cradle of the white child so close that the whip would cut across her face and neck if she dared to doze off.²⁰ As God's Spirit started to move, Minty's actions displayed a difference to those around her. Many months Minty prayed for God to change the master's heart and to convert her or kill him.²¹ God was sending Minty visions and dreams from all the praying she was doing.

In 1844, she married a free man named John Tubman.²² The marriage was complicated with Harriet being a slave. Eventually, she changed her name to Harriet after her mother and took on John's last name.

After the death of Master Edward Thompson on the 9th of March 1849, Harriet decided to escape to avoid being sold. The death of any slave master would raise the prospect of selling enslaved property to pay off real estate taxes.²³ In 1849, the escape venture was to take place with Harriet and her two brothers who backed out. Eventually, a few days later Harriet struck out on her own. It was in this time of running away that she encountered a white lady who befriended her and helped in her journey.²⁴

²⁰ Bradford, *The Extraordinary Life Story of Harriet Tubman*, 15.

²¹ Bradford, *The Extraordinary Life Story of Harriet Tubman*, 16.

²² Jean M. Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 15.

²³ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 16.

²⁴ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 16.

Harriet worked through a network of people who assisted in her journey to freedom. She reached Delaware and met Thomas Garret, a white Quaker Underground Railroad operative.²⁵ Garrett helped Harriet by connecting her with the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, an interracial fugitive aid group.²⁶ Once settled in Philadelphia, Harriet began to make plans to return to bring her family members to freedom. Through the Underground Railroad network, she was able to bring two of her brothers to freedom in Philadelphia.²⁷ In a little over a year, Harriet had made three successful rescues for about ten slaves.

Slaves could not be seen talking together, and their communication was by slaves singing the words of their familiar hymns. When slaves were unwatched, with a meaning look to one and another. When dat ole chariot comes, I'm gwine to lebe you, I'm bound for de promised land, Frien's, I'm gwine to lebe you. It was the signal Moses was there and it was time to escape.²⁸

It would be impossible here to give a detailed account of the journeys and labors of this intrepid woman for the redemption of her kindred and friends.²⁹ It has been stated that she helped more than 300 slaves to successfully escape to freedom.

With all that had taken place, the escape and helping others to freedom, Harriet had reached celebrity status. She even gave an interview to a Bostonian journalist named Benjamin Drew.

Now that I've been free I know what a dreadful condition slavery is. I have seen hundreds of escaped slaves, but ain't never seen one who was willing to go back

²⁵ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 18.

²⁶ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 18.

²⁷ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 23.

²⁸ Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Harriet, the Moses of her People* (New York, NY: J J Little & Company, 1901), 31.

²⁹ Bradford, *Harriet, the Moses of her People*, 40.

and be a slave. Slavery is the next thing to hell. If a person would send another person into bondage; he would be bad enough to send them to hell if they could.³⁰

Because freedom seeking slaves felt protected in Harriet's company, she became known as "Moses."³¹ Slave-holders offered a reward of \$40,000 for the head of the woman who appeared mysteriously, and enticed away their property, from under the very eyes of its owners.³²

It was not long before Harriet Tubman became a speaker for the Anti-Slavery movement and spoke at the Fourth of July meeting in Massachusetts. Harriet's notoriety caused her to be sought out to support and speak at events and meetings. Her first public association with a Women's Rights movement was in the 1860's. It was at these meetings that she told the stories of brutal slavery and how "Moses" brought other slaves to freedom.

Harriet Tubman preached and lectured in many different venues and traveled across the nation often. Although she could not read or write, other people kept records and wrote about her experiences. The historical aspects of her life have significant importance and contribution to the future. There is a certain excitement that happens when the life and chronicles of Harriet Tubman is read.

In military action in 1863 on the Combahee River, South Carolina, with Colonel James Montgomery, Harriet Tubman and soldiers were successful. They set fire to

³⁰ Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 25.

³¹ Rosemary Sadlier, *Harriet Tubman* (Toronto, Dundurn: 2012), 109, accessed May 23, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³² Bradford, *Harriet, the Moses of her People*, 36.

buildings, destroyed bridges, and freed many of the slaves on the plantations.³³ Harriet became friends with Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and other abolitionist that spoke out against slavery in the southern states. After the Civil War and slavery had come to an end, Harriet knew the fight for the enslaved people was far from over.

Historical periods in Harriet Tubman's life are under-recognized. Her work as a healer schooled in herbal medicine who went to the Sea Islands to cure dysentery and her role as a savvy military strategist in the Combahee River campaign which freed over 750 enslaved people are less well known.³⁴ She spent decades as an activist and organizer. In 1893, she purchased twenty-six acres of land with buildings to open a home for the aged.

Tubman's work in alliance with the black women's club movement and her labors for women's suffrage are under-acknowledged, as is her advocacy against economic exploitation on multiple fronts, a vision that shaped her work around poverty, housing, schooling, and aging. Her unflagging efforts as a fundraiser and community organizer are generally overlooked; likewise, her political practice of solidarity is under-theorized.³⁵

At the 1896 NAWC convention, there was a public celebration to honor Harriet for the uplifting of black womanhood. The celebration of Tubman, cheering her speech and applauding her contributions signify a reverent yet reshaping of Tubman's legacy to support a politics of respectability.³⁶ Harriet was an outstanding woman that God used to benefit others at a time of oppression and slavery. Her heroic and powerful acts made her

³³ Sadlier, *Harriet Tubman*, 130-131.

³⁴ Vivian M. May, "Under-Theorized and Under-Taught: Re-Examining Harriet Tubman's Place in Women's Studies," *Meridians* 12, no. 2 (2014): 28, 49, 226, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1691010122?accountid=12085>.

³⁵ May, "Under-Theorized and Under-Taught," 22-49.

³⁶ May, "Under-Theorized and Under-Taught," 22-49.

a trailblazer that promoted change for African Americans and empowered women.

Harriet Tubman lived a life of hardship and victory. She died on March 10, 1913. In

1995, the Federal Government issued a postage stamp commemorating her life. She is the first black woman to be honored on a twenty-dollar bill.

Madame C. J. Walker

Sarah Breedlove, aka Madame C. J. Walker, was an African American woman who was born two years after slavery had ended. The post-civil war attitude towards blacks was much the same as pre-civil war. She was a determined woman who endured hardtimes and family problems. These issues were the impetus that propelled this woman to start a movement that is still impacting and empowering even now in the 21st century.

Sarah Breedlove, “Madame C. J. Walker,” was born December 23, 1867, in Delta, Louisiana. She was born free as the fifth child of Owen and Minerva who were emancipated slaves.³⁷ Just like so many ex slaves in the south, the family stayed on the plantation. The family continued to live on the Robert W. Burney Parish plantation as sharecroppers after they were emancipated slaves.

Tragedy struck the Breedlove family when Sarah was just five years old. Minerva, her mother, died suddenly; and two years later her father, Owen, died.³⁸ Sarah had to live with her older sister, Louvenia, and brother-in-law, Willie Powell. This was an arrangement Willie was not happy about, and he used the situation to be cruel to Sarah. Willie expected Sarah to find a job, and at ten years old she began working as a

³⁷ Kathryn Lasky and Bennett Nneka, *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker* (Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2000), accessed May 5, 2017, Google Scholar.

³⁸ Susan Bivin Aller, *Madam C J Walker* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 2007), 9.

laundress. She washed and ironed for white people. The washboards, heavy tubs, boiling water, and strong laundry soap made from lye stung her eyes and skin.³⁹ Young African American girls had to be strong in order to survive.

With a strong desire to leave her sister's home and have her own home, Sarah married Moses McWilliams at fourteen years old.⁴⁰ Willie Powell, her brother-in-law, was so mean and cruel to her that this was her way of escape. At seventeen years old, Sarah gave birth to her daughter Lelia.⁴¹ Moses died two years later, and Sarah was a widow at twenty years old raising a young daughter.⁴²

Sarah wanted a better life for Leila and herself and moved to St. Louis, Missouri, like so many other blacks from Louisiana and Mississippi. Soon after arriving in St. Louis, she became a member of the St Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴³ The church was a place of support and provided Sarah the opportunity to get to know the influential people in the community. Interacting with the influential and elite people of St. Louis caused her to question what type of future she and Lelia would have.

In 1894, Sarah Breedlove married John Davis, a man who struggled with alcoholism, unemployment and frequents bouts of violent rage.⁴⁴ Her faith in God, dedication to the church and work in the community was her comfort. She worked

³⁹ Aller, *Madame C J Walker*, 10.

⁴⁰ Aller, *Madame C J Walker*, 10.

⁴¹ Aller, *Madame C J Walker*, 11.

⁴² Rosemary Ndubuizu and Lisa Hetfield, "Madam C J Walker," *Junctures in Women's Leadership: Business*, ed. by Lisa Hatfield and Dana M. Britton (New Brunswick, N J: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 39. Kindle Edition.

⁴³ Ndubuizu and Hetfield, "Madame C J Walker," 42.

⁴⁴ Ndubuizu and Hetfield, "Madame C J Walker," 43.

diligently with other church members in raising money to help the less fortunate in the community. Sarah gained the admiration and respect of church members and the community, which also helped to build her own self esteem. Her actions gave her the confidence to begin making changes in her life and seek out other work. This included ending the abusive relationship with John Davis.

Sarah was experiencing hair loss at a rapid pace. There were no hair care products for black women during this time. Black women had to use whatever they could. Some used bacon grease or concocted homemade products to maintain their hair. Sarah Breedlove developed a haircare product for women.⁴⁵

Her claim was the product details were given to her in a divine dream. A big black man appeared to her and gave her directions on what to mix for her hair. Some of the remedy was from Africa, but she sent for it, mixed it and put it on my hair. A few weeks later her hair was coming in faster than it had fallen out.⁴⁶

In the beginning, she only wanted to grow her hair back and not provide products for other women. However, there were many reasons she decided to take her product to market. In her church, haircare or lack thereof, was a definite indicator of class.

In 1905, Sarah realized that the hair products she made could lead her to find a better way of life. She began to help friends and family by sharing her homemade products. Soon afterwards she decided that it would be in her best interest to sell them. Sarah relocated to Denver, Colorado, so she would not be competing with another sales lady named Annie Pope-Turnbo Malone.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ndubuizu and Hetfield, "Madame C J Walker," 43.

⁴⁶ Ndubuizu and Hetfield, "Madame C J Walker," 43.

⁴⁷ Penny Colman, *Madame C J Walker: Building a Business Empire* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 2012), Kindle Edition.

Sarah was not shy in the least of promoting her products and giving testimony of how they had changed her appearance.⁴⁸ Her advisor and good friend, Charles Joseph Walker, whom she had met in St. Louis soon joined her in Denver. The couple was married on January 4, 1906.⁴⁹ Sarah changed her name to Madame C. J. Walker because she thought it sounded dignified.⁵⁰

Madame C. J. Walker began to travel extensively promoting her business. She was earning a profit but was not satisfied. In September 1906, she went on an eighteen-month sales trip and traveled to nine different states by train.⁵¹ She was recruiting and training other women to become sales agents for her product.⁵² In 1908, Madame C. J. Walker decided it was time to relocate again and chose Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, as a place to launch her businesses. She began to successfully open beauty salons and Leila's Beauty School.⁵³

Madame C. J. Walker earned over \$8,000 from her businesses in 1908.⁵⁴ She was featured in the *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory* as one of the most successful business women in the community.⁵⁵ Gaining community recognition as a black business

⁴⁸ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵¹ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵² Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵³ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵⁴ A'Lelia Perry Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C J Walker* (New York, NY: Scribner Press, 2002), 140.

⁵⁵ Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 140.

woman propelled her to a greater level. Women were seeking her out to attend the classes on beauty and hair care.

Madame Walker was able to gain the support of Booker T. Washington and the National Negro Business League. She also became friends with Rev. Charles Parrish. Parrish was President of the Eckstein Norton Institute for training black teachers.⁵⁶ Politicians and intellectuals were a part of her inner circle as she became wealthier and more powerful as a business woman. She became the first black female millionaire and empowered many women across the nation. Madame C. J. Walker worked with the NAACP and other organizations to help blacks.

One of her main causes and activist roles was to end discrimination against blacks. During the riots against blacks in 1917 to 1919, she and a small group of leaders traveled to Washington DC and met with President Wilson and Congress to make lynching and mob violence a Federal Crime.⁵⁷

Madame CJ Walker was an advocate and activist who had both respectability and the financial means to provoke change across the nation. She loved to entertain and attend parties. She was an elegant woman born two years out of slavery with very little education but worked to become one of the richest and powerful women of her era. She impacted the movement and changed the lives of millions of black women even to this day.

Sarah (Madame C. J. Walker) suffered from hypertension. On a trip to St Louis, Missouri, she became very ill in her private railroad car. Her attending and private physician, Dr. Ransom, concluded that her situation was dire. Dr. Ransom stated her last

⁵⁶ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

⁵⁷ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle

words were; “I want to live to help my race.”⁵⁸ Madame C. J. Walker died May 25, 1919, at fifty-one years old. She is buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City. Her life and legacy are an inspiration to all women past, present, and future.

Conclusion

As you can see, women have been and are continuing to be empowered and used to affect change in communities and the lives of others. When many of the negative traditions are broken, leaders in the black communities will realize that God has placed women on this earth for a powerful purpose. Women are beginning to realize they have worth and can achieve greatness in every area of life.

Historically, during the era that Truth, Tubman and Walker lived, it was uncommon for women to be leaders and spokeswomen for any cause. The patriarchal society of the past did not afford woman many opportunities to prevail and accomplish greatness. Nowadays, women are more educated and engaged in their communities. Silence and neglect regarding our African American history has brought about a profound ignorance in our communities. Facts and information about the outstanding works of African American women and men have to be shared if we are to empower our people. Not only do we need the guidance of God to assist in opening minds and educating our people, we must be willing vessels that will stand in the midst of adversity and proclaim that we have come a mighty long way by faith and refuse to digress.

Exposing facts and truth about our history as African American people will help us to understand that we must persevere together as a people. Too often we leave our

⁵⁸ Colman, *Madame C J Walker*, Kindle.

history to others that are not willing to provide an accurate account of the great exploits of women like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker. The profound effect of knowing our history has made positive changes in our communities. Searching our history to uncover truth may bring about sadness and anger based on the Transatlantic Passage, slavery, and the subhuman treatment of blacks. History should be the catalyst that propels us to move forward into upward mobility. Those who died and suffered will not have experienced the sting of the whips, being sold off from family, rape, abuse, starvation, and other forms of suffering in vain.

It is our God given rights that we obtain social equality and secure privileges for all women. A historical distinction of African American heritage is women who have endured so many unforgivable and unforgettable acts of hatred and adversity. Faith in God and prayer have been the foundation that has helped us to persevere. The history that African American women has endured should be remembered and reiterated to every generation. Remembering the hardship of past events and the history of our culture is the motivating factor that will not allow us to forget or repeat it.

The foundation of my project is Women Empowerment. The project and papers' main focus is the outstanding women who God empowered and anointed during one of the most horrific eras in history. God raised up Sojourner Truth and gave her the platform that she needed to speak out about slavery and Women's Suffrage. Harriet Tubman was a woman of courage and strength that was not deterred or moved by circumstances or what was evident. She lived a life of faith in God for guidance and direction. Madame C. J. Walker was a woman of prayer and works. Her life was lived as a servant to help others become empowered and successful. She and God had a strong connection. It was

by faith, prayer, and perserveance that she developed products that allowed her to become the first black female millionaire. When women are empowered and allowed to use their God given talents, they can and will do great exploits for themselves, family, churches, and communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The previous papers that have been written as an ongoing theme for this project explored the biblical and historical aspects of women empowerment. Ruth, Naomi, and the Samaritan Woman at the well have given insight into women that empowered each other and women that were empowered by Jesus. As a continuation, this women empowerment project will research how various theologies have both positively and negatively impacted the lives of women, specifically African American women. Theologies such as pneumatology, ecclesiology, liberation theology, and womanist theology will continue to build upon the foundation that has already been established. An examination of each of these theologies will provide insight into the women empowerment project. This is not an exhaustive study, but one that will provide a better understanding of women empowerment from a theological perspective.

A powerful phrase often heard in women's groups and circles is "there is no tool more effective for development than the empowerment of women."¹ Usually, the statement does not carry much merit outside of these groups. Women in religious settings and in the community are considered as helpers and not leaders. All too often women are

¹ Secretary-General Kofi Annan, *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, accessed September 13, 2017, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2006/wom1586.doc.htm>.

the ones who do the menial jobs. There is a much-needed empowerment medium that can be implemented that will allow mentoring and support to uplift women.

The African-American community in West Las Vegas has a myriad of economic and social challenges. Although the black community has gained many advances since the Civil Rights Movement, there are still numerous problems that have continued to evolve since that time. Poverty, job loss, substance abuse, single parent families, and an urban and hip hop misogynistic culture are partially to blame. Lack of resources, time, love, and affection, low self-esteem, and hopelessness all compile women's issues. The breakdown of the family structure affects the black community in every way. Therefore, the measures that can help empower women in this community are overshadowed by the day to day attempt to overcome these issues and maintain a modicum of stability. Women of every age and religion are dealing with these issues in the community. "Black women faced a variety of constraints in their lives because of private sphere of responsibilities bequeathed to them as women."² There has undeniably been an uphill battle for equality among black woman. Not only is there a disparity between them and the dominant white culture, there is even a great gender disproportion in their own race.

Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, "No great victories are won in a war for transformation without total participation."³ Community and church support must be garnered for this cause. Women are not merely symbols, help-mates, and the feminine side of God without substance and merit. They are the strength and the pillars of society.

² Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Oute Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Press, 2010), 4.

³ Martin L. King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 37.

Biblical women have been revolutionary in promoting change in patriarchal traditions. The changes were wrought by aggressive, uncompromising actions chapter after chapter in the Holy Scriptures. Women are still in pursuit of egalitarianism in the twenty-first century. “Issues of race, gender, and class inequality that effect black women’s lives in America point to problems embedded in the fabric of the nation.”⁴

Women have many obstacles and hurdles to overcome in the church and community. “Black women in America are calling into question their suppressed role in the African American church, the community, the family, and the larger society.”⁵ Women are called to take their place in the community, the church, and in changing black culture to be more accepting of non-traditional roles. With the breakdown of families since slavery, women have been thrust into multiple roles as matriarch, head of household, breadwinner, and more. The shameful aspect of this situation is the black women’s contribution to history and society has been totally disregarded.

Pneumatology

There is an ongoing discussion about the Holy Spirit and how He uses women. There must be clarification regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the role of dealing with women. The ministry of the Christian is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit minister’s words of comfort and guidance and ministers as God’s

⁴ Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2011), 16.

⁵ Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,” *Cross Currents* (1998): 488-499.

agent. It is the Spirit of God that inhabits the words, that speaks to the spirit of another and reveals Christ in and through him.⁶

From a theological perspective, it is the Holy Spirit that is instrumental in the building and forming of the church and community. The power of the Holy Spirit can draw all men and women to Christ when lifted. God's desire is gender equality with no lines of separation, since we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Where ever people are, the Holy Spirit is at work. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalms 34:18). When women are dealing with the element of abusive relationships, whether it is from clergy, domestic violence, or substance abuse, they do not often believe they are loved or worthy of receiving God's love. All too often they are objects of control. The person they are involved with takes on the surrogate role as God in their lives. The abuser wants complete control of the individual's life and becomes very dominating and controlling when they are not obeyed and revered. Mutual respect is not a part of the equation, and the relationship becomes extremely imbalanced, usually in favor of the abuser whose goal is to control every aspect of the individual's life.

Around the world, women have often been viewed as property, to the extent that it took American suffragette Susan B. Anthony years to campaign for women's voting rights, which was finally allowed in the United States in 1920.⁷ However, even with these political actions, African American women were excluded from laws made

⁶ John G. Lake, *Pneumatology* (Kindle Locations 156-157), accessed November 7, 2017. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Pamela Kole, *The Psychology of Abusive Relationships: How to Understand Your Abuser, Empower Yourself, and Take Your Life Back* (Kindle Edition), 21.

predominately for white feminist women. The focus was on white women issues and struggles and failed to address black women who were not of the white privileged middle class.

Within the biblical text, women were often held in low regard by men. Empowerment was not a word that could be considered for females during those times. In fact, in many parts of the world the same issues are prevalent. “Men are still overwhelmingly responsible for the major versions of the bible used in congregations and classrooms, even when women are invited to participate.”⁸ Sadly, the very people who are extending the invitation may not be totally sincere in wanting women to participate in ministry or other work in the classroom or community. How does this impact the women who wholeheartedly embrace the idea of being productive for God?

Black women have considered the Bible to be a major source for religious validation in their lives. Though Black women’s relationship with God preceded their introduction to the Bible, this Bible gave some content to their God-consciousness. The source for Black women’s understanding has been twofold: God’s revelation directly to them, and secondly God as in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience.⁹

In most cases, the patriarchal leader’s preference is for the women to be silent in the church. “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as it saith under the law” (I Cor.14:34-35). Therefore, no progress or upward mobility is gained because of this

⁸ Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2017), 284.

⁹ Kathleen McIntosh and Kate Bagley, *Women’s Studies in Religion: A Multicultural Reader*, accessed September 16, 2017, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jno2DwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT79&dq=she+speaks:+wisdom+from+the+women+of+the+bible&ots=Bwz4NqNmQP&sig=8gcpCFdCm9wp5DL7j9YDqk_-ziA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

ideology. Women remain on the fringes and outskirts without clear objectives and direction.

The Old Testament Biblical Foundation for the project is Ruth 1: 1-12; the scripture is based on two women empowering one another. Both Naomi and Ruth were childless widows whose trials were brought about because of the death of loved ones and circumstances beyond their control. They lived under a patriarchal society where women were not free to make their own choices. “Naomi and Ruth are metaphorical depictions of the state of barrenness that Israel is facing as a result of their disobedience to God.”¹⁰ In spite of the journey, and no matter what obstacles they may have encountered along the way, they persevered. The Holy Spirit led them home and back to the right place. God was still consistently working behind the scenes of their lives to bring about blessings and success.

What an outstanding parallel of the hardships African American women have endured from slavery and how God has always been present and very much involved in their circumstances. “Black women often acknowledged the call of God to challenge evils found within American society, drew connections between their religious understanding and the meaning of social justice, and/or offered hard-hitting analyses of black oppression.”¹¹

¹⁰ Linda B. Hinton, *Basic Bible Commentary: Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 26.

¹¹ Marcia Y. Riggs, “The Socio-Religious Ethical Tradition of Black Women: Implications for the Black Churches Role in Black Liberation,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol 43, 1-4. assessed November 6, 2017, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost*.

Secular leaders may not be aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in the community. However, the churches are very conscious of God's manifestation and demonstrations in the body of Christ. Therefore, if God is not a respecter of persons according to Roman 2:11, then there is a serious misconception in the leadership of many churches and secular organizations regarding women equality. While churches and communities are discussing diversity and inclusion, there is still a broad disparity between men and women. African American women fare much worse than other ethnic groups. "Many of the female personalities in the Bible are pre-eminently progenitors of the Black woman of today in terms of her 'low estate' circumstances, enormous faith, and responses to opportunities to exercise ministerial leadership."¹²

The Samaritan Woman at the well is an excellent example of societal and church prejudice. This woman was deficient of what was considered societal norms in her times. "She is a Samaritan, and a woman who has been married five times. Jewish law permitted only three marriages."¹³ The man she lived with is not her husband "(John 4:18). With all her deficiencies, Jesus defied the status quo and confused the disciples traveling with him. Jesus empowered the Samaritan woman as evangelist to carry the message that He was the "Messiah."

Jesus held the longest recorded conversation with a woman who was marginalized and came to draw water from the well after the other women had left. It was unheard of

¹² Cain H. Felder, "The Bible, Black Women, and Ministry," *The Journal of Religious Thought*, 41, no 2: 47-58, accessed November 7, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost 1985.

¹³ Felder, "The Bible, Black Women and Ministry," 47-58.

for a woman, and a “Samaritan” woman no less to talk with a Jewish man. By Hebrew culture she was considered a “dog” and worthless.

By the prevailing standards of Palestinian society in the time of Jesus Christ, the woman was to take no part in public life; she was to remain as unobtrusive as possible, confining her duties to domestic responsibilities. Accordingly, the woman of the ancient Near East enjoyed extremely minimal rights in either civil or religious spheres.¹⁴

God was near and in the circumstances of the women who lived like prisoners covered from head to toe in polygamous households without any rights or privileges. “The Torah itself seems to presuppose that generally the woman is inferior to the man; the wife is largely the property of her husband.”¹⁵ Exodus 20: 17 states, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Historically, people have pondered and deliberated about God’s existence and where God came from. Deists believe there is a supreme being, a creator that does not intervene in the affairs of mankind or the universe. They believe God is far off and not near. However, God is very present in the affairs of humanity. It is stated in Isaiah 40: 28, “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”

We know God exists because God the Holy Spirit is very much at work in the earth. The Holy Spirit enables us to have a relationship with the eternal God through the intermediate relationship of Jesus. There is an assurance in knowing that through Jesus

¹⁴ Felder, “The Bible, Black Women and Ministry,” 47-58.

¹⁵ Felder, “The Bible, Black Women and Ministry,” 47-58.

and by the Holy Spirit's power and presence, we can have an intimate relationship with the eternal God.

“The gospel tradition provides substantial evidence that women, with the advent of Jesus' public ministry, began to be viewed as entitled to greater rights as human beings and to assume larger responsibilities and more significance in the primitive church than was customary.”¹⁶ When the Holy Spirit begins to move in the lives of women and transforms them into the likeness of Jesus, they come into a clearer and deeper understanding of themselves and of God. According to the writings of Guy Duffield and Nathaniel Van Cleave, “The supernatural experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by some unmistakable sign by which the seeker is assured that he has received.”¹⁷

Ecclesiology

To receive a better understanding of the church's role, there must be a study of the church. According to the Miriam Webster dictionary, “ecclesiology is the theological doctrine relating to the church.”¹⁸ The church is a body of Christian believers that are called to serve God and to preach the gospel of Jesus to the world. “The church will always have to present itself both in the forum of God and in the forum of the world. It stands for God in the world, and it stands for the world

¹⁶ Felder, “The Bible, Black Women and Ministry,” 47-58.

¹⁷ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 320.

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster, “Materialism,” Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2014, accessed November 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/materialism>.

before God.¹⁹ Women in biblical times were given the opportunity to serve Jesus and the church in its early stages. Throughout the New Testament scriptures there are many women that served with the apostles. They were included in the duties of the church, “women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support” (Luke 8:2-3).

Women have been a vital asset to the church from the beginning. “Whatever the church is or ought to be in other respects, the theological concept must take the church and its own claim seriously”²⁰ The church is called to be a place of equality and inclusion for everyone. Women have an obligation to the world and the church to evangelize, to carry the gospel message, and impact their communities in a positive manner. They are not second-rate citizens or Christians because of their gender or race. God has called us to serve as equals in the body of Christ.

“We are united to Christ through His Word and to one another through love, and this is our ultimate identity. “The shakiness and confusion of our earthly identities whether ecclesiastical, civil, or familial, while perhaps a matter of great importance, are suspended atop something absolutely and eternally solid.”²¹ God’s foundation is secure

¹⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 2.

²⁰ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 4.

²¹ Joseph Minich and Bradford Littlejohn, *People of the Promise: A Mere Protestant Ecclesiology*, (Kindle Locations 397-399). The Davenant Press. Kindle Edition.

and vast enough to encompass women ministers and leaders that are committed to working in his vineyard.

So many women are apprehensive about moving forward to become leaders or ministers. They have numerous reasons such as not wanting to move above or out from their circle of friends. The fear may be how they will be viewed by others who have differing views. It could possibly be fear of being seen in a perceived male role. It may be concern of having to talk in a public setting where friends and strangers will scrutinize them. Although women have stronger relational skills than men, women's ways of caring and relating is often downplayed and almost never connected with the pastoral care done by women in the pastoral office.²²

Historically, men in ministry, community, and business leadership positions have been the ongoing oppressors of women. Their rationale is constructed from scripture in 1st Corinthians chapter 14 where women are to be silent in church settings. Paul emphatically dismisses the usage of the God given gifts and talents of Hebrew women in church even though women were sincerely supporting and advocating for the ministry of Jesus Christ. Paul instructs them to be silent in the church and ask their husbands questions at home. Metaphorically speaking, these words began a snowball effect that has continued to reverberate down through history and is still impacting women in churches and denominations two thousand years later.

Paul states women should not usurp authority over men and supports his statement by referring back to the created order, 'For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.' Paul's connection to the created order is Paul's command in this passage applies universally to all churches and is not something that was unique to the context of the letter. God wants his created design of male

²² Jo Ann Deasy, "Father Images and Women Pastors: How our Implicit Ecclesiologies Function," *The Covenant Quarterly* 72, no. 3-4 (August 2014): 143-157. accessed November 10, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

leadership and female submission in the family to extend into the functioning of the church.²³

There are countless men who follow this trend. It began to pervade other areas of women's lives such as business, education, and politics. Oppressive attitudes that have become woven into the fabric of history and have not only limited but in many cases prohibited women from fulfilling their God given purpose.

Women have no interest in usurping authority over men. What their united undertaking is, is to not be relegated to the sidelines by their male counterparts. Nor do they desire to see their churches and communities subjugated by patriarchal dominance. It is women of every race, ethnicity, and culture that faithfully fill the church pews on a weekly basis. Women and children participate in community events and programs far more than men. As a part of the body of Christ, women theologically should automatically have the power to participate in the writing of ecclesiology as the process of critical theological reflection of the church on itself.²⁴ The church is Jesus Christ visible and tangible in the world and commissioned to spread the gospel. This means every member is fitted and joined together and is not fragmented or divided by denominational prejudices, nor gender or racial oppression.

²³ Deasy, "Father Images and Women Pastors," 143-157.

²⁴ Natalie K. Watson, 2001. "Reconsidering Ecclesiology: Feminist Perspectives," *Theology & Sexuality* 14, 59-77, accessed November 12, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

Black Liberation Theology

Having explored how theological foundations of pneumatology and ecclesiology relate to this project, it is imperative to include a liberation theological perspective on women empowerment. What is black liberation theology? “Black theology believes that the God of freedom has created African Americans to be free, to reach their full humanity without obstacles blocking the goal of becoming human beings who can freely do God’s will.”²⁵

Black theology of liberation supposes that if the African American church is a true follower of the Way of Jesus and surrenders to the empowerment of the divine Spirit, then its work is to help build on earth God's new Common Wealth for the poor, those who are both materially without wealth and spiritually poor.²⁶

Women are viewed differently as it pertains to liberation theology. The late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall stated, “the first three words of the Constitution, ‘We the people’ did not include women who were denied the vote or blacks who were enslaved.”²⁷ When we examine the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well of Sychar in John chapter four, he did not enforce the stereotypical worldview held regarding women. “Jesus is shown breaking down the cultural barriers of first-century Palestine. When he spoke to the woman by the well, he was breaking the traditions of men toward women.”²⁸

²⁵ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Kindle Locations 141-142). Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

²⁶ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 172-174.

²⁷ Diana L. Hayes, *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 26.

²⁸ Pat Holliday, *Handmaidens of the Lord: Women Preaching the Gospel Book 1*. (Kindle Locations 82-84). Agape Publishers, Kindle Edition.

Historically, female accomplishments have gone virtually unnoticed and unrewarded because satanic powers by design have tried to conceal them. Men have kept women in subjection in their communities and churches for centuries. However, we have embarked upon an era when women are no longer allowing this type of subjugation to continue. Society can no longer deny, refuse to acknowledge or not support the gifts and talents of African American women in black churches or in their black communities. This is a farce, a travesty, an absurdity, and a complete mockery of African American women. It is stereotypical of male dominated black churches and black communities to slowly hasten the equality of women. It is the cruel kind of a patriarchal society's desire to persistently underutilize the gifts and talents of women with discrimination, inequity, and injustice. "Black theology, therefore, is an effort of African American people to claim their blackness and their freedom as people of God. Freedom comes when black poor folk, led by the African American church, live out their freedom because God helps them in their daily struggle against personal pain and collective oppression."²⁹

Women are empowering themselves and other women to move forward into less submissive roles. Great women like "Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker were highlighted in the Historical Foundations paper. Without reservation and with great trepidation, these women defied the racist oppressive systems in their era. They wrestled against powerful, spiritually wicked forces, and equally iniquitous human forces that continually tried to block African Americans from achieving the full humanity God had intended. Faith in God was the instrument that allowed them to move through dereliction, racism, white supremacy, and to overcome triumphantly. "It meant having

²⁹ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 148-150.

faith in a movement for individual and systemic liberation, a liberation that is the final work that God and oppressed people will carry out to bring about total freedom.”³⁰

Black liberation theology can be the ongoing catalyst that will provide upward mobility to African American women and their communities. “The Apostle Paul is committed to patriarchy and the silencing of women in 1 Corinthians 14: 34.”³¹ Many male leaders and pastors in the black community reinforce this teaching. Jesus’ attitude and interaction with women were always times of empowerment and teaching moments. Jesus never instructed women to be silent in his meetings or during times when he performed great miraculous works. It is evident that Jesus is God incarnate, the Son of Man, our cosmic judge. The actions, interactions, and words of Jesus do not support the Apostle Paul’s later scripture writings. Since Jesus is “God,” it is apparent that Jesus’ actions, and words supersede those of the Apostle Paul regarding silencing women. Paul’s letter is sent specifically to the Corinthian church and not to any of the sister churches. This does not by any means constitute doctrinal influence over all women in all churches. It is evident there were many issues that engulfed the church at Corinth that did not pertain to the behavior of women or silencing of women in the body of Christ.

Womanist Theology

Stephanie Mitchem states in her book that, “Womanist Theology is the systematic faith-based exploration of the many facets of African American religiosity. Womanist

³⁰ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 159-160.

³¹ Lucy Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 12.

theology is based on the complex realities of black women's lives."³² The theory and practice has been accepted in many African American religious circles of women as an illustration of spirituality and social action.

African American women exude attitude, colorful essence, determination, flair, perseverance, and sassiness; yet, they are fragmented in many areas. They have lost an intricate part of themselves. "Isness," according to Webster's Dictionary, is the quality or state of elemental or factual existence.³³ They have lost their "Isness." There is disharmony with the present state of being for African American women that is out of sync with the infinite "oughtness" of God's perfect design. The way things are concerning black women is not the way things ought to be.

Many women feel they are insignificant persons based on mistreatment and the undue racism and suffering they have endured. Others may believe they are socially and financially inept due to lack of education and having to work menial low paying positions. In most cases, the church and community fail to identify with the womanist perspective. Women who systematically opposed the laws of the land fought in the ongoing struggle of equality and gained rights that have benefited other black women throughout history.

In the black communities and churches, whether it is admitted or not, there are still strong patriarchal systems in place that denigrate women. The harshest reality is women have accepted this as a biblical standard for submission to leadership. "Let

³² Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Kindle Location 77-83). Orbis Books, 2002. Kindle Edition.

³³ Merriam-Webster, "Isness," Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2014, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isness>.

everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Rom. 13: 1, 2). There is an ongoing belief that to not submit, or to have a voice and speak out about injustice against women, is to be in rebellion against authority and will inflict some type of self-imposed judgment.

Since issues of social change were framed in religious terms, and religious perspectives focused on social change, black women participated in religious discourse even in settings where their right to preach was not affirmed. Subordination and subservience were evident problems, but not silence, isolation, and exclusion. Not only did black church women fashion important and necessary roles for themselves, they also had a powerful effect on religious discourse.³⁴

There are women in the community and church that refuse to come totally under this influence. This has been the pivotal point for some women that have left the traditional church to begin more progressive and inclusive ministries. Women have taken on more political action and roles in the community since government directly affects them and business decisions. They are searching for belonging and community. Women are looking for opportunities to exercise their gifts and talents in fulfilling and creditable engagement. When they commit to a community or congregation, there must be confidence they are received with love and that God is present in their daily lives.

The goal of the church and community is to assure that women’s voices are heard, and they are utilizing the gifts and talents they were born with. There has to be mutual giving and receiving; if not, the church and community will perish. In this era women are too often categorized by bureaucratic domination and depersonalizing structures and systems. They are seeking out smaller assemblies where they can forge more profound

³⁴ Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Kindle Location 77-83), 147-153.

interpersonal relationships with other black womanist who hold similar views. These are women who celebrate Jesus' solidarity with the downtrodden and ostracized in society.

Womanist theology continually stresses the fact that the white feminist did not and does not speak to the suffering and multiple ongoing negative experiences of black women. Much of the black woman's struggle with oppression, racism, and sexism has often been a direct result of white racist feminist.

African American women understand there is no single person, male or female, that has everything it takes to overcome black racism, classism, or gender and racial oppression. We must desperately work together if we are to overcome. No longer will black women submit to patriarchal leadership that does not have vision, that makes every decision, and does not share ideas or opportunity. A fundamental change called womanist theology is the antithesis and change in basic assumptions for shared leadership. Black women are gravitating more toward churches that empower and where they can use their gifts and talents to transform their communities. In many cases, they are more educated and professional than many of their black male contemporaries. African American female scholars join with their black brothers in the struggle against white supremacy in the church, society, and educational institutions.³⁵ In other words, the reality of being black in America unites womanist and black theologies.

In context, God and humanity meet through God's direct communication with poor black women through Jesus and God's revelation in the bible. Black women must receive and interpret God in their own context. The significance of Christ is his humanity,

³⁵ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 1974-1976.

not his maleness.³⁶ In the reality of embracing all black women, despite educational level, faith tradition, or sexual preference, in all honesty, “ain’t they women too?” They have also been in the struggle for equality and empowerment. According to Alan and Craig Osten, “homosexual activist is finding resistance from African American groups on the effort to piggyback on decades long struggle for equal rights.”³⁷ There are still efforts to alienate or exclude black women based on these differences in Christian belief. It also increases greater levels of racism, oppression, and disenfranchisement for African American women. They are still God’s beautiful specimens in need of empowerment despite how they are viewed.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is breaking new levels in the church and community. The empowerment dynamics for this project that will be examined and concentrated on is women can no longer be treated in a nonchalant, indifferent, and tentative manner. The question lingers after discussing pneumatology, the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of black women. Ecclesiology speaks to the responsibility that black women have in the ministry of Jesus Christ and their community. Black liberation and womanist theology are intricate parts of our past, present, and the writing of our future. What are the active steps black women must take that will promote change in status quo to impact the black church and black community?

³⁶ Emilie Maureen Townes. “Womanist Theology.” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3-4 (2003 2003): 159-176, accessed November 28, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

³⁷ Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda: Exposing the Principal Threat to Religious Freedom Today* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2003), 23.

Now is the time to empower and highly esteem women that are marginalized.

Women have been victimized from abuses of every type. There is no time to procrastinate, but confront, and contend with the seriousness of the issues that women are dealing with. Sisterhood has become mired with distrust, suspicion, jealousy, and maliciousness among black women. Empowerment is imperative for women, so they can speak positive affirmations and uplift one another instead of reacting to hundreds of years of negative indoctrination from oppression. God gives spiritual vitality and brings life, power, and strength that can begin the transformation process in women. This will be a change that will expand to the churches and out into the community.

The goal of this empowerment project is to offer alternative ways to reach women that do not attend worship services and are disaffected for whatever reason. Offering spiritual empowerment groups will bring about a sense of belonging and comradery among the women where faith and love are mutually uplifted and supported. In the past, the black church and community arose from slavery as the only dominant and stable institution. The African American woman is the mother of black culture and the backbone of her family.

This women's empowerment project must have liberating factors and qualities in order to be successful. Initially, the women must have a liberating interaction, a liberating impact, and a liberating revelation. This can alleviate or reduce a lot of the initial anxiety that may be prevalent in the sessions. Therefore, empowering the women to want to tell their stories, claim their freedom, and embrace their shared beliefs will be a goal. This may greatly assist them in moving toward deeper levels of deliverance and commitment.

African American women are usually reluctant and will not often participate in support groups. Support groups provided by African American churches could prove to be helpful and a safe place where women can express their full range of emotion.³⁸

Women do not have to give into despair and the pressures they face in life. God can empower and support them to handle every challenge they go through.

Faith in God's provision and justice can help sustain the brokenhearted women that suffer in domestic violence relationships, substance abuse, incarceration, and clergy abuse. Empowerment helps one to understand, no injustice, inequality, racial oppression, or acts of violence go unpunished, and sacrificial suffering in God's eyes are rewarded. The deepest fears and strongest doubts are usually internalized experiences rooted in pain and rejection. Women who not only are doubtful about God, but also doubt that they will ever overcome, or find peace in this life, can have their lives transformed and renewed.

As we revisit Ruth and Naomi in the Old Testament and the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar in the New Testament Biblical Foundations paper, God was always in control of their circumstances, and they were never forsaken or forgotten no matter how dire things became. Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker in the Historical Foundations paper were black women in the church and community who were slaves, raped, abused, beaten, starved, and suffered mental trauma. They are celebrated and respected for their ability to survive through all the complexities and conflicting realities of life. The strength of this empowerment project for black women is they will know that God is on their side and able to do beyond what they can ever anticipate.

³⁸ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa Snorton, *Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 53.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The problem to be addressed in this unit will focus on empowering women who have experienced abuse. Many women in the church and community are marginalized and not permitted to participate in ministry and community projects. In this project the women will be encouraged to move forward into areas they have been apprehensive about. The project focus is, “If women dealing with abuse in the church and community learn to trust God’s direction, they can develop a mature faith and have a better understanding of the Holy Spirit’s power to impact change in their lives?”

The Biblical Foundations paper gave examples of God empowering women like Ruth and Naomi in the Old Testament and the woman at the well of Sychar in the New Testament. These women were able to overcome the patriarchal culture and systems in place not allowing women to be independent, autonomous, or self-sufficient. The Historical Foundations presented a movement of African American women – Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Madame C. J. Walker – who were contemporaries. These women were supernaturally empowered by God to provoke change during slavery and Jim Crow Laws.

The Theological Foundation addressed the Holy Spirit’s role and operation in the lives of African American women. According to Joel 2: 28, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your

young men will see visions.” The Holy Spirit empowers and breaks down racial barriers and Jim Crow laws in every generation. One of the questions that was proposed in the Theological Foundation is what steps must African American women take that will promote change in the status quo to impact the black church and community? Overall, there are various examples that will show with coaching, education, and guidance, abused African American women can be empowered to do great exploits for God in their churches and communities.

There were many revelations and encounters of women hearing directly from God, seeing visions other impartations, and possessing gifts from the Holy Spirit. These were women who were descendants of slaves, share croppers, household servants and domestic workers. In a slavery and Jim Crow culture, they were truly the “least of these”.¹ What are the possibilities of these revelations and impartations being customary today? Further research for this paper will endeavor to answer these questions in greater detail.

Disciplines that will be used to inform this unit are education, leadership, and psychology/counseling. There are women who have and are making strides in each of these areas. Resources will be used from various sources such as journals, books, and websites, which can provide a substantial foundation and further empower this project. The study of the existing work on transformation through empowerment will address the basic and fundamental issues that African American women are dealing with.

¹ Yolanda Nicole Pierce, “Womanist Ways and Pentecostalism: the work of recovery and critique,” *Peuma* 35, no. 1 (2013): 24-34, accessed December 9, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost.

Overall, there are many examples and models to show that with education, psychology, counseling, and leadership, abused African American women can be empowered to do great exploits for God in their churches and communities. It is imperative for this women's empowerment project to have liberating factors and qualities to be successful. The women will grow, be impacted, and used by God.

Theoretical Foundations in Ministry Practice

Women empowerment for the various types of abuse that African American women are subjected to in the black community has been a longstanding, cultural, social, and historical ideology. Recently, it has just begun to attain local, regional, and national attention. Abuse from clergy, domestic violence, and substances has been a historical paradigm which has been entrenched in the African American community for generations. African Americans view it as a "cultural silence," one never to be vocally expressed, a makeup of our painful history. According to Stephanie Crumpton in her article, "there is a need to recognize that certain dominant forms and conclusions in biblical interpretation may be serving to reinforce forms of dominance, oppression, and agendas of power."²

When deliberating on a project involving women, specifically abused women, it can be quite an undertaking based on the level of participation and the queries that will take place. What is the measurement for a project of this sort and the various approaches

² Stephanie Crumpton, 2004. "No safe space: the impact of sexist hermeneutics on black women survivors of intimate abuse: a womanist pastoral care perspective." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 32, no. 1-2: 99-121, accessed December 11, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

and methodologies that are required? Abuse and oppression in any manner can become a cycle that can ultimately leads to self- destruction. It may cause individuals to stay in situations which are offensive, harmful and unproductive. It often fills women with despair and hopelessness as the abuse from clergy, domestic violence or other forms are perpetuated over and again. Each foundation paper – Biblical, Historical, and Theological – outline the importance of women. God’s supernatural power is shown through the love and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The operative question is how to empower abused African American women to have outstanding significant and remarkable impact in the community and the churches. While the reclaiming of personal power is the primary concern, womanist pastoral care providers are particularly sensitive to the social dynamics of black women's context, which may affect this process of rebuilding.³ There are other women in the church and community who have overcome every aspect of abuse, hardships, and in some cases oppression. “Given the Black Church's historical position as safe harbor and advocate in the community, acceptance by the church/community is particularly essential to Black women in general.”⁴

The black churches and community must show they value women. Needless to say, abuse in any form against women is much more than a crime of violence. It is a statement about society’s view of women and itself. Those who support these ungodly beliefs forget that women are the mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters, and nieces who have

³ Crumpton, “No safe space,” 115.

⁴ Crumpton, “No safe space,” 115.

raised the fathers, sons, uncles, brothers, and nephews. Women are the creative and co-creative force of the world, along with God the ultimate creator.

African American women have a personal, social, cultural, and historical responsibility to empower other women and expose any sort of abuse. It is imperative to assist in helping to heal wounds and to help overcome obstacles. This empowerment project will work diligently to make sure women are protected and secure. According to Cheryl Sanders, “We must begin by unmasking and healing the rampant self-hatred, self-doubt, and low expectations that plague many of our black churches and institutions of higher learning, and those in the black community”.⁵ Leadership from every aspect has a responsibility to women by making certain they are cared for and nurtured.

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but those who have stolen it, deals in distortion and death to our vocation to become more fully human.⁶

An undertaking of this magnitude requires the ability to ask poignant and critical questions. It will also take true benevolence and grace for reconciliation and healing to begin in the church, community, and among the women. “Awakening to the culture of silence, and, beyond that, to the human person as a broken unity, calls attention to an even deeper silence, the indwelling presence of One who comes to heal.”⁷ The Holy

⁵ Cheryl Jeanne Sanders, 1996, “Hope and Empathy: Toward an Ethic of Black Empowerment,” *The Journal Of Religious Thought* 52-53, no. 2-1: 1-17, accessed December 11, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁶ Rita E. Guare, “Educating in the ways of the Spirit: teaching and leading poetically, prophetically, powerfully,” *Religious Education* 96, no. 1 (2001): 65-87, accessed December 18, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁷ Guare, “Educating in the ways of the Spirit,” 74.

Spirit is aware of each person's painful past. Therefore, God is able to minister healing and comfort in ways that humans cannot by reaching out to help the women who have suffered from clergy. Domestic violence and substance abuse are not the easiest tasks. When people are hurt and wounded, they are often guarded and may be combative. The Holy Spirit, by faith through prayer and scripture, can move barriers and walls allowing the women to open up about their harsh experiences.

So many African American women are afraid to speak because they are in fear of further retaliation from clergy and community leaders. It is typical for women to not to trust the people that should be supporting and assisting them. Clergy and leadership have key roles in working to combat abuse of any type, because women are more inclined to address these issues with them. Matters that are not properly handled by leadership and the church create additional problems for the victims. The women are left to believe there is no help or hope for them. In many instances they feel as if God has forsaken them and are not concerned with the crisis situations they are in. Now is the time for leaders and pastors to correct the wrong theology surrounding women and submission issues.

According to Hans Baer, "Women who gravitate to spiritual churches are generally triply disadvantaged in that they must struggle with the discriminatory effects of racism, classism, and sexism."⁸ The churches are the primary foundation stone that the entire African American community is devoted to and rests upon. Breaking down the strategic objectives of the leadership in the community is difficult because they have a tendency to be less defined. The world is rapidly changing, and the church must also

⁸ Hans A. Baer, "The Limited Empowerment of Women in Black Spiritual Churches: An Alternative Vehicle to Religious Leadership," *Sociology Of Religion* 54, no. 1 (1993 1993): 65-82, accessed December 18, 2017, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

think strategically and practically in spite of where they are or have been in the past. At the mega-level thinking, the African American church and community have the specific function of reaching out as described in the Great Commission. It bears the burden of being the light in the face of the darkness and the destructive forces of abuse. Mental models that the church cling to out of obligation, tradition, or status quo do not align with obedience and love that Jesus preached. It is the Christian leadership and counselors who are best suited to deal with and help to overcome abuse.

The church has the spiritual component missing from clinical and self-help programs. Therefore, it is able to teach concepts and principles to help develop strong family and social relationships which will enrich the Black communities. Satan often sets up traps to affect future generations from not functioning in the will of God. Working to destroy abuse in every form at its roots before it becomes a stronghold is required as well as community interaction and response. This is necessary due to it having greater adverse consequences among African Americans. Addressing the abusers' conduct and a no tolerance policy will help promote stability and steadiness in the community. Not having a collective reaction will only minimize the dilemma and promote ongoing suffering for women and their families in the church and community.

Ruth and Naomi in the Biblical Foundation paper in the Old Testament pericope had to overcome adversity because they were women without a male presence. Ultimately, this was the cause of many types of hardships. Under the Mosaic Law there were stipulations regarding women and the family. Women like Ruth and Naomi, who were widows, were considered to be helpless and hopeless without a patriarch. Even with Naomi's decision to send Ruth away, there was a bond. "Ruth prevails in her insistence

on staying with Naomi, attests to the strong personal bond that the young widow has created after Ruth has steadfastly devoted herself to her mother-in-law, the women are now a twosome, inseparable for life.”⁹

Widows and orphans were considered defenseless in biblical times. Widowed women like Ruth and Naomi were without many options. Women without God’s direction and intervention would sooner or later become impoverished, beggars, or even become prostitutes, subjecting themselves to more hardship and abuse from the community, leaders, and the clergy.

Theoretical Foundations from Other Disciplines

Educational Perspective

There are other disciplines that speak to this project and the work others have started. Education is an area that has been the vehicle to empower African American women for generations. Women cultivated leadership skills and provided necessary community services such as education and neighborhood programs that were key links in plans for racial progress.¹⁰ The church has the tools that can restore brokenness to wholeness. The word of God and prayer are the added resources that can turn abused

⁹ Yitzhak Berger, 2009, “Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Case of 1 Samuel 25,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, 253-272, accessed December 19, 2017, *Old Testament Abstracts*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Mary K. Schueneman, “A leavening force: African American women and Christian mission in the Civil Rights Era,” *Church History* 81, no. 4 (December 2012): 873-902, accessed December 20, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

women into Godly and loving individuals that will initiate change in the church and community.

According to Thomas A. DiPrete and Claudia Buchman, “Women have not merely gained educational equality with men; on many fronts they have surpassed men by a large and growing margin.”¹¹ Women are beginning to take their places in the churches and community. African American women are evolving and acknowledging they are powerful beings that can accomplish whatever they desire.

Maisha Handy writes, “Black women must be intricately involved in the systemic processes that shape the formation, development, and progress of the community voicing their perspectives.”¹² Black women will triumph by educating the church, community, and one another. This will be beneficial in building self-esteem and hope. Starting a dialogue with the people who are predisposed to abusive behavior will help abusers and the victimized.

The objective of this project is to evaluate intervention and prevention approaches through education and classes in the African American church and community. There is not nearly enough information on the church’s role, and the programs needed to assist in eradicating these problems. Anger management, domestic violence, and substance abuse programs nationwide are evidence that the problem is both significant and widespread. With all the policies in place, there has to be better solutions. It is the churches and community’s responsibility to protect women from the challenging and detrimental

¹¹ Thomas A. DiPrete and Claudia Buchman, *The Rise of Women: The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), 1.

¹² Maisha Handy, 2004. “Fighting the matrix: toward a womanist pedagogy for the Black Church,” *The Journal of The Interdenominational Theological Center* 32, no. 1-2: 51-81, accessed December 22, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*.

individuals who impose danger to the church and the community. As a result, not just the classification of the official dynamics surrounding this difficult matter are essential, but also the detailed plan and strategy to ultimately eradicate the abuse are just as important.

Substantial research on education from the faith perspective has proclaimed that the problem is rooted in contextual misunderstandings and conflict in grasping the truth of the messages. “As teachers of the Bible it is the important that church leaders communicate the scriptures in the proper context. It is the pastor’s responsibility to portray to the congregants the correct context in which a text was written.”¹³

One example in scripture is, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” (Eph. 5: 22). The text is often taken out of context regarding a wife submitting herself to her husband.

In household rules or ‘*Haustafeln*,’ the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle of necessity extends to all mankind.¹⁴

Women are often advised to tolerate the abuse for the sake of holding the family together. They are told to stand behind the man who is possibly suffering from job loss, alcohol, or drug addiction, or mistreatments in other areas of life. The problem exists in patriarchal cultures where men are the most powerful members in the churches and community. Since women have been relegated to a lesser place in the church, men develop unrealistic role expectations and perceptions of their dominance through the family structure.

¹³ Lynda Marie Jordan, “Domestic Violence in the African American Community: Role of the Black Church,” accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.pluralism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Jordan.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ross Dudley, 1999, “Submit Yourselves to One Another: A Socio-Historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15-6:9,” *Restoration Quarterly* 41, no. 1: 27-44, accessed December 22, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

There are definite conclusions regarding educating the community in three specific points: it is a massive problem; it is a considerably serious one; and thirdly, the situation is escalating rapidly. Churches in the black community are not actively engaged and women have no place to turn for a much-needed support system. Therefore, women continue to suffer in silence or disconnect from the church and community.

When women of color go public, sharing precisely the disrespect occurring in our churches and classrooms with members of the larger educational community, far too many of our intellectual compatriots in the learned societies of religion and biblical literature, typically oriented toward justice advocacy, appear to be disinterested observers or casual bystanders.¹⁵

The observable facts can be viewed from every possible perspective. It includes education, leadership, and the psychological/counseling aspect. A study of these particular areas will determine there is no single cause but a myriad of reasons. Education is a key component towards positive change. It is difficult to be an instructor or facilitator attempting to bring education when people are in denial about being victims. Women are on different levels and each one at a different place in their lives. The instructor or facilitator has an implausible responsibility to assist the women in learning the curriculum regarding overcoming abuse. Although education is key, there may be no opportunity for these women to confront or make peace with their abusers. Abused women who are Christians may try to understand their suffering by believing it is “God’s will” or “part of God’s plan for their lives.”¹⁶ “Interdependence as a value in the Black

¹⁵ Katie G. Cannon, .2016. “Eliminating Ignorance,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 1: 114-120, accessed December 21, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁶ Tawana Davis, Owen Strachan, Lindsey A Holcomb, and Justin S Holcomb. 2015, “After domestic violence, why should a Christian wife call the police, not a pastor, first?: addressing a sin that at some point afflicts 1 in 4 US women,” *Christianity Today* 59, no. 1: 26-27, accessed December 22, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

community, especially among women, is important as we recognize the responsibility of the whole family, community, church, society in protecting, preventing, caring for, calling out, and bringing justice.”¹⁷

Psychological Perspective

Psychologists are interested in the root causes of domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Although there is an extensive amount of literature on the subject, it still presents inconclusive findings. Ehrensaft, Moffitt, and Caspi write, “Studies of partner violence and psychiatric disorder are cross-sectional, rely on retrospective reports of prior psychiatric disorder, and thus are not ideally designed to disentangle the temporal association between partner violence and disorder.”¹⁸

Women who are victims of abuse may believe that life is hopeless and may have a greater proclivity towards not caring what happens to them. Some women may shut down and may even accept the abuse as normal. “Psychology is being beckoned to honor its overdue promise to favor a more comprehensive array of human experiences”¹⁹ Women may turn to other coping mechanisms to survive and get them through difficult times. “Black women’s use of spirituality to cope with mundane and oppressive transgressions with the spiritualized support of family, church, and a deeply personal relationship with

¹⁷ Carolyn McCrary, 2000, "Intimate violence against Black women and internalized shame: a Womanist pastoral counseling perspective," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 28, no. 1-2: 3-37, accessed December 22, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

¹⁸ Miriam K. Ehrensaft, Terrie E. Moffitt and Avshalom Caspi, “Is Domestic Violence Followed by an Increased Risk of Psychiatric Disorders Among Women But Not Among Men? A Longitudinal Cohort Study,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 2006, 163:5, 885-892.

¹⁹ Angelina Graham, 2016 “Womanist Preservation: An Analysis of Black Women's Spiritual Coping,” *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 35, no. 1: 106-117, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

what Alice Walker calls the divine Mama”²⁰ Even with a divine connection spiritually, there may still be a need to seek out professional assistance to deal with the aftermath.

“Abuse prevention programs have the potential to reduce the public health burden of mental disorders. However, research has not conclusively ruled out the possibility that partner abuse may be spuriously associated with subsequent psychopathology because it is merely a marker for preexisting psychiatric disorders.”²¹ Women are suffering in the black churches and communities due to clergy and community leaders dismissing abuse as non-problematic or not willing to address this difficult issue. Since women have a tendency to talk openly with the “pastor,” they may disclose that they may be in abusive relationships and other situations.

The church and leaders in the African American community has an unrealistic attitude regarding the various types of abuse that women are subjected to. There is a belief system that is outdated and lack understanding of the extent and magnitude of the problem. Only the leaders that are professionally trained in psychology and counseling are aware or sensitive to the problem. “When churches teach otherwise, they not only fail to provide psychological and emotional care, they also fail theologically”²²

Ministers might be able to recognize religiously influenced symptoms of psychological disorders such as religious delusions. It is likely that parishioners would respond better to a minister working to correct these delusions than someone who is outside of the faith. Clergy who consult with spiritually inclined

²⁰ Graham, “Womanist Preservation: An Analysis of Black Women's Spiritual Coping,”107.

²¹ Ehrensaf, et al, “Is Domestic Violence Followed by an Increased Risk of Psychiatric Disorders Among Women But Not Among Men? A Longitudinal Cohort Study,” 886.

²² Tawana Davis, Owen Strachan, Lindsey A Holcomb, and Justin S Holcomb, 2015, “After domestic violence, why should a Christian wife call the police, not a pastor, first?:addressing a sin that at some point afflicts 1 in 4 US women,” *Christianity Today* 59, no. 1: 26-27, accessed December 22, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

and in-tune mental health professionals could feel more comfortable and competent in such situations.²³

However, sadly to say, the black church, pastors, and community leaders have not been proactively involved when responding to abuse of any type against women. This is highly problematic since African American women are in greater danger of abuse.

In 2007 black female victims of intimate partner homicide were twice as likely as white female homicide victims to be killed by a spouse (0.96 and 0.50 per 100,000, respectively). Black females were four times more likely than white females to be murdered by a boyfriend or girlfriend.²⁴

African American women in clinically abusive relationships were more likely than men to experience consequences such as depression, marijuana dependence, and especially PTSD. The abuse is often associated with high rates of depression, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders.²⁵

Black women are more likely to seek out the church and family as an alternative to contacting other agencies or law enforcement. It is highly interesting to note that African American women are often perceived as “strong black women” from the historical times of slavery. It is often because of this paradox that under these particular guises of compassion, religion or on other words, “strong womanhood,” that African American women over the course of time have voluntarily and freely allowed men to treat them as though they are men’s most worst enemy; and because of this sacrifice,

²³ Jessica Young Brown and Micha L McCreary, 2014, “Pastors’ counseling practices and perceptions of mental health services: implications for African American mental health,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 68, no. 1:, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

²⁴ Shannan Catalano, Erica Smith, Howard Snyder, and Michael Rand, BJS Statisticians, *Female Victims of Violence*, 2009. 1-8, accessed December 22, 2017, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvv.pdf>.

²⁵ Ehrensaf, et al, “Is Domestic Violence Followed by an Increased Risk of Psychiatric Disorders Among Women But Not Among Men? A Longitudinal Cohort Study,” 889.

mentally and emotionally, they very often are accused of trying to usurp the men's power, authority and dignity.

According to Casardi, Rohling, and Vivian, "Wives who experienced marital aggression reported clinical levels of depressive symptomatology. Recommendations are offered, and risk markers are identified to improve detection by physicians of patients who may be involved in violent marriages."²⁶ Abuse can take on many forms besides physical aggression. Women suffer from verbal abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, clergy abuse, that manifest in pain, hurt, and often reckless behavior. To be specific, *Miriam Webster's* definition of abuse says, "abuse is a corrupt practice or custom, language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, and angrily, physical maltreatment."²⁷

Typically, violence against women is explained in terms of a power struggle. In a patriarchal society those with all the power, male must resort to violence when their position of dominance is threatened. Domestic violence is a consequence of patriarchy, and part of a systematic attempt to maintain male dominance in the home and in society.²⁸

Dealing also with the clergy abuse aspect, pastors often overstep their boundaries and become involved with those they are counseling. Women who come for counseling for various types of abuse can easily become victims of clergy abuse.

In a pastoral relationship when counseling is involved there is an imbalance of power. The pastor retains the authority of his/her knowledge position and personal gifts. The counselee is in a vulnerable position and must trust the counselor to protect his or her interests. When

²⁶ Michelle Cascardi, Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Dina Vivian, (1992), *Marital Aggression: Impact, Injury, and Health Correlates for Husbands and Wives*, accessed December 22, 2017, Archives of internal medicine. 152. 1178-84. 10.1001/archinte.1992.00400180048007.

²⁷ Merriam Webster's Dictionary, "Abuse," Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2014, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abuse>.

²⁸ Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and domestic violence: challenging common misconceptions," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (September 2007): 573-594, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

the pastoral counselor engages in sexual activity with a counselee, it is an abuse of pastoral authority and a betrayal of the client's trust.²⁹

The Leadership Perspective

Leadership in the church are not always fair when dealing with women and abuse. Women are often ostracized when dealing with domestic violence and other abuse issues, especially if the husband is also a member of the same church or considered to be a leader. If she decides to make the abuse public and choose not to endure this humiliation any longer, questions will arise asking why she is acting this way toward her husband. She immediately becomes part of the out group.

The quality of the relationship between leader and a follower is an important determinant of how each follower will be treated. Women are more willing to open up regarding abuse issues if they believe that their leaders have a genuine concern for their welfare. If the leader provides support for feeling of self-worth, guidance, and feedback, then communication will not be difficult.

It is only through the participation of women in greater numbers in positions of power in society and by providing them with adequate skills, which empower them, that they can be realistically involved in all processes of political and socio-economic activities, and that their role in the community can be effectively appreciated.³⁰

²⁹ Reta Halteman Finger, 1987, "Too close to home: domestic and sexual violence," *Daughters Of Sarah* 13, no. 4: 4-27, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

³⁰ Roswith Gerloff, 2000. "Raising the Profile of Black Women Leaders in Community: Report of an Action-Oriented Workshop," led by RoseMarie-Rita Chukurah-Odiachi, *International Review Of Mission* 89, no. 354: 338-340, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

Effective leaders know it is totally impossible to treat each person the same. It is important for each person to feel they are respected. When dealing with leadership regarding domestic violence, this is not always the case. The women may receive the opposite treatment. In the church she may be relieved from offices or positions held. Therefore, team building efforts and team support are usually contingent based on not making trouble or allegations that will impede progress in the church or workplace. “Women often while trying very hard to be a team, misinterpret each other's hopes, communication style, and use of power.”³¹ There are instances where compassion falls short and judgment is in the lead. Empowering women has become a phrase that is attached to many issues that have absolutely nothing to do with empowerment of women. Once again, relegating the seriousness of helping women to be victorious, strong, focused, and powerful is diluted in the rhetoric.

According to Fluker, “the goal of the moral life of these seekers begins and ends in community, and their ethical project seeks the same in every dimension of life, personally, socially and spiritually.”³² There are ongoing challenges regarding in what manner spirituality and religion can be identified and utilized as a method of encouragement and empowerment. Church and community leaders can no longer stand idly by on the sidelines while women in the community suffer from abuse in many forms.

“Every great leader who has brought about creative change and transformation has done so with a community of fellow travelers who are organized around vision,

³¹ Norma Cook Everist, 1996, “Leading Women: How Church Women Can Avoid Leadership Traps and Negotiate the Gender Maze,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 23, no. 6: 455, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

³² Robert Fluker, *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Books, 2009), 5.

mission, and specific goals and strategies.”³³ Overcoming the issue of abuse is a concerted community effort that will initiate the change that women are so desperately seeking. Since it is so widespread, there is no longer time and room for setting this situation aside.

Leadership in the churches and community has shifted the burden of this horrific transgression of abuse onto the woman. Women are urged to not expose abuse but to continue in prayer and remain faithful to the sacred vows of marriage, even if the cost may be her mental health and stability, or even her life. Ultimately, forgiveness is the key that will overcome any obstacle. Realistically, the pastors or leaders have no interest in intervening.

Church and community leaders may not punish perpetrators of abuse that are in their congregations or employment because the perpetrator’s friendship with the leader, the position the perpetrator may hold in the church or workplace, or financial reasons. Lack of punishment may be based on if the person pays a large amount of money in tithes and offerings or if they are good employees in the workplace. More often, support may be denied by leaders. She may be believed to be out of God’s will for ending the abuse, exposing the perpetrator and ending the abuse and relationship. In many instances the women stay in the abusive relationships based on these assumptions.

Culturally, many black women believe it is not anyone’s business what goes on in another person’s home. Therefore, they should not interfere in other relationships, even to the detriment of a life being lost. Domestic violence carries with it powerful and strong controlling mechanisms among many African Americans.

³³ Fluker, *Ethical Leadership*, 6.

Fluker writes, “How might we prepare leaders to recognize the need and place of spirituality in the development of habits and practices that nurture morally anchored character, transformative acts of civility and a sense of community?”³⁴ While there is a great need, the response of the black church must be the training and education of black clergy with regards to domestic violence and other forms of abuse. It begins with educating the community, understanding the psychological signs of abuse and training clergy and leaders to provide adequate counseling for the victims.

Pastors undoubtedly encounter persons who are victims and perpetrators of abuse. “The fact that domestic violence occurs in the homes of ‘church-going’ Christians, including the homes of Christian clergy, ought to make us wonder what is being heard, seen, said, and done in our Christian assemblies that allows the violence to continue”³⁵ There are countless opportunities for clergy and leadership to develop and improve counseling and pastoral care experience to understand and recognize individuals dealing with abuse issues.

Religious congregations should provide information and support for married couples in the form of workshops and seminars, along with professional assistance for leadership, and assistance in healthy conflict and communication skills. Leadership is a key component in aiding and assisting black women in the African churches and community.

³⁴ Fluker, *Ethical Leadership*, 7.

³⁵ Marjorie Procter-Smith, 1987. “Reorganizing victimization: the intersection between liturgy and domestic violence,” *Perkins Journal* 40, no. 4: 17, accessed December 23, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

Conclusion

The model for ministry that will be used in this project is a six-week empowerment classes for African American women dealing with abuse. The ministry project and model will be conducted at Second Baptist Church in West Las Vegas, Nevada. The sessions will take place with a group women twenty-five years old to sixty-five years old. The women will engage in prayer, empowerment, and classes to educate them on trusting God while being proactive.

The study material (that is being developed) is forthcoming. It will help the women to learn to trust God and become more confident in their own abilities. Women are hurt and wounded from clergy, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Many of these women are moving at a slow pace. According to Nancy Boyd Franklin, “The first strength recognized in black families is the strong kinship bonds and extended family relationships”³⁶ Women who are even in their pain and suffering feel obligatory to make sure family members and close friends are cared for. The sad thing about it is they will remain broken vessels until they receive and activate self-care and understand God can change pain into peace and brokenness into wholeness. Some of the women live in poverty without husbands and are in a constant struggle to provide the most basic needs. The volume of work on and by black women can help contribute our understanding of black family life.³⁷

³⁶ Nancy Boyd-Franklin, *Black Families in Therapy: Understanding the African American Experience*, Second Edition (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2003), 19.

³⁷ Leonor Boulton Johnson and Robert Staples, *Black Families at the Crossroads: Challenges and Prospects* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 36.

Trust and empowerment to make positive change are the key component of this project. In the Theological Paper, the discussion was on black women who have lost their “Isness.” Things in their lives are very different than what God planned them to be. Some of the women have forgotten who they are and what they are able to accomplish. Jesus’ transformative power can turn around and change any situation when there is complete trust. All the women are in different levels of spirituality and outcomes will vary. However, it is the goal that each woman participating in this project will experience change and transformation, if they desire it to be. Helping the women to overcome self-esteem issues and empowering them through the Holy Spirit will provoke the change in their lives and what is needed to make this project successful.

This project will not be just another fellowship where women “greet, meet, and eat.” Seeking God’s power and presence for direction is first and foremost. Only God is able to bring about the results that will be everlasting and beneficial for their lives. Women must be empowered to provide the help that is needed for the next generation of youth in their communities. Women that can take on a project and see it through to the end with confidence and assurance that their conviction of God is righteous and faith-filled to the end. Although abuse has been a long-standing issue in the African American churches and community, now is the time to “break the silence and stop the violence.”

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The title of this doctoral thesis and project is “Empowering Women through the 3C Model: Christ, Compassion and Church to Overcome Abuse in Las Vegas, Sin City.” The context for this project is Second Baptist Church and the Bridge of Faith Outreach, Inc., a para-church 501(c) 3 ministry located in West Las Vegas, Nevada. The church congregation is a body of predominately African American believers. The community surrounding the church is impoverished and has a very high concentration of drug sale and abuse. The majority of the congregation at Second Baptist Church has lived there for three or more decades and are long standing natives of Las Vegas.

Second Baptist has a diverse background of individuals who attend the church. There are professional people such as attorneys, doctors, educators and a host of military retirees. Some of the people are newcomers who have relocated to the North and West Las Vegas areas and joined the church. These people have a commitment and faithfulness to the historical aspect of Second Baptist and the West side. Many of these people are highly instrumental in maintaining the dynamic atmosphere of the church and the surrounding community for the building up of God’s Kingdom. Congregants of Second Baptist Church have a vested interest in the welfare of the people who live around the church and the community at large. The church is altruistic in nature, providing weekly

meals for families and food distribution from their food pantry. Single mothers, addicts, and women who are dealing with all types of issues and problems are welcome to come to the church. They are served food, leave with bags of grocery, and uplifted spiritually.

Since the church is located in midst of a large drug culture and poverty, outreach is mandatory. There may not be a strong desire or willingness by many people who are served by the church to change behavior. Typically, wherever there is an infestation of drugs, abuse is also prevalent. Domestic violence and substance abuse are often manifested in the black churches as clergy abuse toward women. This is due to the patriarchal culture and mindset.

Leadership in the community and churches do not always work favorably on behalf of women. All too often women are marginalized and relegated over to the sidelines because many of these women are not educated and have self-esteem issues. Most of the time the church and community which they are a part of overlook them and their children. Many of their issues are because they lack education and resources. They have alcohol/substance abuse dependence, domestic violence, and gender inequality. The churches in the community may not be equipped to handle all these problems. However, para-church organizations can come alongside traditional churches to assist in helping the women to overcome these problems. There are many who desire change for themselves and their children but may feel there is no help for them. In the West Las Vegas community, the leadership does not always work favorably on their behalf in terms of empowerment.

Hypothesis

This hypothesis studies African American women within the black community and church who have been victimized by abuse. The women in question have dealt with and suffered various types of abuse such as clergy abuse, domestic violence and substance abuse. This writer is not conducting an exhaustive study of either of the abuse types but will focus on how the women can make the transition from abuse to becoming empowered women. This work will explore what are the necessary skills required that will determine success and a positive turnaround in their lives.

The hypothesis of the researcher's main goal is to progress further than mere analysis and examination. It will hopefully motivate women to move into the development and educational stages. Eventually, these efforts should result in advancement into a leadership and mentoring program created to empower abused women. At the beginning of this project there was a great amount of apprehension. Through prayer and meditation, God gave clear direction. The Second Baptist Church and the West Las Vegas Community have not been friendly or welcoming to women clergy through the years. Clergy abuse, which can be a misogynistic attitude, has been the prevalent culture in both the church and community. Not one female has been permitted to serve in this church that has been in existence for seventy-five years. There has not been a female elected to a local political office in this community.

The accepted culture in this community and churches is a failure to inculcate a sense of moral responsibility toward women. Ultimately, it has created a breeding ground for other types of abuse against women. God is breaking strongholds and traditions in the

church and community and opening the way for a clear-cut avenue to fulfill the necessary requirements of this project.

Intervention

The context of this research project is Second Baptist Church, a predominately black congregation of about one thousand plus members. The church is located in the heart of West Las Vegas, Nevada. The approximate population of this area is 21,234. The church has more women than male members, yet not one woman associate minister has been active in ministry. They had the titles but were not permitted to work in ministry in that capacity.

A lady joined the church who was seminary trained with a Master of Divinity Degree and came highly recommended by the vice president of a seminary. She knew the women were in need of empowerment, encouragement, and emancipation. They needed prayer, education, and their voices heard. Many of them had been indoctrinated to believed “women are not called to preach and are to be silent in the church.”

Second Baptist Church had to break tradition and add a female clergy to the ministry team. The church is slowly becoming a place for women to move forward in their lives. Although women have deaconess titles and a “women’s ministry” is in place, they have miniscule and limited roles. The problem in the church and community is when women try to move into leadership or ministry, the “powers that be” become oppressive and obstructionists. Women are not validated, nor are they empowered. There is no intention of allowing the women to advance beyond mediocre roles or use their gifts in a

more spiritual way. Even fewer pastors are sincere and honest in how they deal with helping women grow and become leaders.

“From slavery to today, African American women have contributed their unique spirituality to black survival and liberation.”¹ Second Baptist Church is making some strides in advancing women in leadership and ministry. Living it out and making a real difference in the church is what counts. Women have not been welcomed nor embraced in the clergy ministry of this church for seventy-five years. In the past, women who were called to ministry or leadership, were literally and physically blocked from sitting on the front pew of the church or in the pulpit. West Las Vegas has a socially constructed lifestyle that incorporates beliefs, boundaries, lifestyles, and values with others in the church and community that share parallel worldviews.

In her Master’s Thesis, “From the Pew to the Pulpit: African American Women’s Struggle to Gain and Maintain Leadership Positions within the Church,” Charlotte B. Chinn posits,

From the time of slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, the church served as an agent where men and women work together to defeat racism and poverty. It was where men and women worked together to combat social injustices. It was a gathering place for participation in activities denied by laws that were enacted to prevent access to public places such as parks, restaurants, and libraries².

¹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 49.

² Charlotte B. Chinn, “From the Pew to the Pulpit: African American Women’s Struggle to Gain and Maintain Leadership Positions within the Church” (MA Thesis, Wright State University, 2014), 4, accessed June 1, 2018. Google Scholar.

Yet, there is a tragic breakdown in the black church in general among male pastors who do not see women as having the right to be ministers and offered certain types of leadership in the church.

There was not a lot of preparation at the church for women to move forward. Many of the woman had to deal with clergy abuse, domestic violence, and substance abuse. There were very few options during this era. However, things are changing rapidly. In order to have upward mobility among the women, the focus has to be on topics of confidence-building, empowerment, liberation, and womanist theology. Information must deal with foundational components that were critical and fundamental. Structural methods that dealt with behavior, culture, life experience, and relationships were also methods of analysis and interpretation.

Gathering a group of twenty women of various ages was essential to the formation and implementation of this ministry model. Ages ranged from twenty-five to sixty-three. Since each of the women had backgrounds of some type of abuse, prayer, scripture and sermons were an intricate part of the forgiveness and healing aspect of the project. The sermon series was entitled: "Fulfilling your Dreams." Genesis 37:10 served as the primary text. The message focused on responding to "What is this dream you had?" The overarching theme of the series was to speak to the empowerment position of the women and help them to not only dream again but also fulfil those dreams.

The focus was developing methods that concentrate on marginalized women that are specific to empowerment. The mandate is to provide insight that women are an important part of society. They are the mothers, aunts, sisters, grandmothers, and a part of a sisterhood that is the glue and strength that holds the church and community together.

Jeremiah 29: 11 reads “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”³ God’s promise is to lead the people out of captivity and from where they were driven. Disenfranchised women who were victimized by abuse will be given the tools to become leaders in the church and community.

This model of ministry included interviews of persons who are connected in some ways to domestic violence and substance abuse counselors. Pastors and community leaders were a part of the process to provide a sense of expertise and knowledge. Dr. Audrey E., a licensed psychologist in Las Vegas, sat in on three meetings and provided insight for the women. Dr. Audrey was excited that there were some leaders and pastors who understood the difficulty of these women and were ready to include the community in this area of empowering women. Karla L., a licensed addiction counselor and owner of ABC Therapy, also sat in on three meetings. This was a safeguard in case the women became emotional or angry during the meetings. Counselors and therapist could help them process their feelings. The women in the group were encouraged and understood that counseling and emotional support were available.

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman hosted a symposium on addiction on September 21, 2018, and some of the women and counselors attended. The women were allotted time to interact and ask poignant questions on gender equality and empowerment opportunities. The questions were welcomed by Mayor Goodman, and she is putting forth a concerted effort in qualifying and positioning more women in leadership roles.

There were deep acknowledgments regarding addiction and abuse. It is traumatic and unfortunate that the clients have had to witness horrible things or

³ King James Version of the Bible.

were mistreated and abused by others. The Lord Jesus went through all of it. God invites them to participate in His sufferings. The healing process is an opportunity to understand Jesus more completely.⁴

Research Design

The methodology of this project contains a varied methodology and a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. For this project, an announcement flyer (See Appendix A) and pre- and post-test (See Appendix C) were used to gather pertinent information; and a questionnaire helped with data collection (See Appendix B).

According to John W. Creswell, mixed methods are a combination of the qualitative and quantitative types of research.

The qualitative method provides expression to understanding the social problems that contribute to individuals and groups. The three core designs in mixed methods research—(a) convergent, (b) explanatory sequential, and (c) exploratory sequential— are detailed in terms of their characteristics, data collection and analysis features, and approaches for interpreting and validating the research.⁵

Creswell further states the mixed method, “bases inquiry on an assumption of diverse data collection allows for a better and more complete understanding than quantitative or qualitative.”⁶ The process entails research that starts with a much broader survey to later gain more comprehensive results. Mixed methods involve the collection and “mixing” or integration of both quantitative and qualitative data in a study.⁷

⁴ Tim Clinton and Eric Scalise, *The Quick Reference Guide to Addictions and Recovery Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 43.

⁵ John W. Creswell, (2017-11-27). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Kindle Locations 701-703). SAGE Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Creswell, *Research Design*.

⁷ Creswell, *Research Design*.

Measurement

The main objective of this project was to gather participation from the church and community. Involvement of both was a contributing factor in helping to change mindsets and attitudes toward abused women. A strong support system would have to come from the church and community. There was a necessity to increase awareness among the members at Second Baptist Church and the West Las Vegas community. There would be a need for much collaboration among the counseling agencies, the church and the other entities for the project to go forward.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this project consisted of both pre-test and post-test surveys. A questionnaire was another instrument designed to be used in this project. Prior to implementation, it is mandatory that all participants are cooperative and willing to invest in and work with abused women. Church and community support based on attitudes and enthusiasm was a key element. Church and community willingness to work with these women were the greatest concern mainly because there are many women in the church who are survivors of all manner of abuse and addiction.

Both surveys, pre and post-tests, gave overwhelming support for these women. Every area in question, both church and community, were willing to extend the highest level of support. The “Me Too” movement and the “Time’s Up” Movement have been the catalyst to begin an honest dialogue with the women. It has also become apparent that there is a pressing need to minister to and begin the healing process in these women. There is a necessity to promote healthy relationships that are vital to relationship building, spirituality and emotional awareness.

In many perspectives, women are dealing with much spiritual warfare. Humans are made in the image of God and placed on earth to so that we may gradually vanquish and reestablish God's all good plan.⁸ When there is abuse of any type, it thwarts God's original design for our lives.

Stakeholders

Professional associates involved in this project include the Rev. Dr. D. Edward Chaney, a United Theological Seminary graduate from the Doctor of Ministry program; Rev. Dr. Audrey Hawkins-Fleming, a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry program; and Rev. Dr. Steven Crymes, graduate of the Interdenominational Theological Center, Doctor of Ministry program. Each person provided guidance and direction in the opening stages of the project. As the project began to take shape, they were hands on and supportive with prayer and spiritual direction as everything began to formulate. They were able to provide insight regarding the value and importance of this project as a vehicle for women who have been considered bad mothers and failures, according to societal standards. The professional associates provided much encouragement and spiritual direction for the project that dealt with transforming abused women into empowered women. Rev. Dr. Chaney was instrumental in helping to come alongside and exemplify the love and compassion of Christ. God indeed looks beyond faults and addresses the needs of His people.

⁸ Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 107.

Context associates were able to assist in the beginning planning stages of the project and later implementation of the “Women Empowerment Forum.” All the weekly meetings were held at Second Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. As the project initiator, I gave an overview of this ministry’s intentions. The group was addressed by the local women clergy and contextual associates regarding what is the necessary path to take for becoming an empowered woman.

Not all of the contextual associates were present at every session due to work schedules and other commitments. However, those that were present were onboard for the project. I addressed the group to explain biblical principles and how it directly connects to women empowerment and overcoming abuse. After the group sessions ended, refreshments were served, and a time of fellowship took place. Once the group started at the time of the initial meeting, an agreement was made to meet every Thursday (June 7, 14, 21, 28, July 12, 19, 29, August 2nd and Saturday, October 20th).

It was at the June 14th meeting that we devised and agreed that all of our meetings would be held at Second Baptist in the VCL Coleman Fellowship Hall. The group participation sign-up sheet was posted and over twenty-eight women signed in. After the first meeting discussion, we quickly lost eight women. These women were not ready to disclose their pain and discuss their abuse; so they left the group.

At the June 28th meeting, we discussed hosting a “Survivor Sister’s Women Empowerment Breakfast” event on October 20, 2018 at the RIO Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. During this meeting Sister Turner came alongside the group as a coordinator and later became a facilitator for one of the sessions. She addressed the group and was

responsible for contacting the women weekly. Her role was to find out if they had any specific questions that needed clarification and addressing from the previous week.

Sister Frye was in charge of registration and the packets to be used in the weekly sessions. Ms. H. Brown became the overseer for the financials, logistics, and planning of the women empowerment program and the “Survivor Sister’s Breakfast” that was held October 20th. Evangelist Garrison, Rev. Braam, Sis. Turner, and Sis. Frye alternated the facilitation and assisting of the weekly groups.

Field Project

Project Seminar

A women’s empowerment event was held as part of the project. The Survivor Sister’s Domestic Violence Breakfast was held 9 am to 12pm, October 20th at the RIO Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Leading up to the event, support was garnered by local and state officials. Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson supported and sponsored women financially. County Commissioner Lawrence Weekly, who hosts “Straight Talk” (a radio talk show), invited Rev. Braam, Ms. Hannah Brown and Yvette Cade (the keynote speaker for the event) to be guests on the show. The discussion was about taking the necessary steps to empower abused women who are subjected to domestic violence, clergy abuse and substance abuse. Yvette Cade told her story about being continually abused by her husband over a period of four years. “Yvette Cade had been working at a Clinton, Maryland, T-Mobile store on Oct. 10, 2005, when her husband, Roger B.

Hargrave, stormed in, doused her with gasoline, chased her outside and set her on fire.”⁹

The weekly cohort meeting was the springboard and the culmination for the empowerment program. The forum included speakers who were community advocates for women. Ms. Lora Picini, Vice President, of Equity, Strategic Policy & Regulatory Affairs at Caesars Entertainment, spoke on “Human Trafficking and Social Responsibility.” Ms. Genese Turner, the Vice President of the Safe Nest Battered Women’s Shelter, spoke on domestic violence issues in Nevada and across the nation. Chaplain Tamia Dow, an ex-Metropolitan Police Officer in Las Vegas, spoke on the abuse of women and gender inequality. There were over one hundred guests in attendance at the event.

Each speaker provided pertinent information that was specific to their topic and program. They also explained their connection to the abused women as survivors or because of work affiliation. Yvette Cade allowed time for a question-and-answer period so the women in attendance could speak freely and candidly regarding their own experiences. Many of the questions proposed were directed to the pastors and law enforcement as to how the churches and community could provide more housing and programs to help women.

“Persons that are survivors of domestic violence and abuse need many avenues of assistance to start their lives over to become healed and productive. There are not nearly enough assistance programs in the Las Vegas area that provide care for women and

⁹ Kathleen Hom, “Whatever Happened to the Woman Burned Alive.” Washington Post, June 27, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-yn/content/article/2010/06/18/AR2010061804508.html>, accessed November 11, 2018.

children.”¹⁰ Women and children may become homeless and find themselves living on the streets because of the lack of necessary resources available. We are diligently working to assist in moving things toward getting the resources to provide more care for these women and children.¹¹

Chaplain Tamia Dow, an ex-police officer for the Las Vegas Metro Police Department, indicated that many of the women and children’s lives are destroyed because of abuse. “When children are exposed to abuse on a continual bases, they undoubtedly will become abusers if they do not receive the counseling that is needed to address this issue. The impact is so severe and can be the opening for drug abuse and crime that may eventually lead to incarceration.”¹²

According to the 2017 Violence Policy Report, Nevada ranks number two in the nation for Intimate Partner Violence and female victims murdered by males. In Nevada thirty-three (33) females were murdered by males in 2015. The homicide rate among females murdered by males in Nevada was 2.29 per 100,000 in 2015. The age for homicides in which the age of the victim was reported (32 homicides), 4 victims (13 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (13 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 43 years old. The race out of 33 female homicide victims, 22 were white, 9 were black, 1 was Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 was of unknown race.¹³

Too many lives are being destroyed as a result of abuse from domestic violence, substance abuse and clergy abuse. Many of these women are not cared for by the leadership and communities they reside in. “In an imperfect world, some will continue to

¹⁰ Genese Jones, Vice President of Safe Nest, 2018, “Survivor Sister’s Domestic Violence Breakfast,” RIO Hotel, October 20, 2018.

¹¹ Genese Jones, “Survivor Sister’s Breakfast,” October 20, 2018, Las Vegas, Nevada October 20, 2018.

¹² Tamia Dow, “Survivor Sister’s Domestic Violence Breakfast,” Las Vegas, Nevada, October 20, 2018.

¹³ Violence Policy Center, *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2015 Homicide Data*, 2017. accessed November 14, 2018. <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2017.pdf>.

be hurt, as they always have been.”¹⁴ There is always faith and hope that change will occur. Most important is that the church and community provide the help whenever possible to those who need it.

Two weeks after the Survivor Sister’s Breakfast, we decided to keep the dialogue going. The last part of the project consisted of a Symposium on abuse and women empowerment. It was held on November 13th, 2018 with Caesar’s Entertainment as the community host. The goal is to have a continuing conversation on ways to help stop abuse and provide shelters and assistance. The forum included me and other leaders that are willing to take up this issue and impact change in the community. It is imperative that all parties involved understand the importance of the life-changing programs. Planning strategies where we can begin community projects that will rebuild lives in the greater West Las Vegas area and the state of Nevada is greatly needed. “Leaders who have a heart after God’s heart will lead the way as God would lead.”¹⁵

Despite the social and economic disparities of poor women who are dealing with different types of abuse, usually women who are given opportunities to make positive changes in their lives, most often take them. Even though they may be vulnerable by gender, race, and many other forms of discrimination, many of these women nonetheless persevere. In order to stop the abuse, violence and all manner of neglect toward women, there must be ongoing initiatives by the government, local community and churches. It must be a concerted effort of working together in order to end the “unfavorable practices”

¹⁴ Robert Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant-Leadership: Essays* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1998), 45.

¹⁵ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character Driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. Google Scholar accessed November 14, 2018.

against women through empowerment. This must begin with the establishing of ministries that are conducive to building character, self-esteem and financial security.

According to Howard Thurman,

Those people who most obviously live with their backs against the wall, for instance the homeless, the working and jobless poor, the substance abused and abuser, the alienated, misguided, and abandoned young people are rarely within hearing or seeing range of company of Jesus' proclaimed followers.¹⁶

When productive ministries for women become a vital part of church formation, there will be a positive change. Church and community leaders must begin working together to help women who are in abusive relationships whether it is in their personal lives, in the church, or their workplace. Far too many women are victimized and are not provided the assistance or tools to help them overcome these problems. Leadership in every capacity has the responsibility to work together to help these women.

As the weekly empowerment meetings progressed, women became more vocal and began to share stories about their abuse. (These stories will be disclosed with fictitious names to provide protection for the women). Each of the following victims of abuse were asked to participate in this research project based on the magnitude of abuse they have suffered. The stories that they share are examples of the ongoing abuse that is so prevalent in the African American communities. These women have unique circumstances that surround their individual abusive relationships.

Darlene, an African American woman, is a minister at a local church. Her husband is an associate pastor at the same church. She has been a victim of domestic violence for over twenty years. She has expressed the need for church support. Her

¹⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012). Kindle Edition, accessed November 14, 2018.

family attends church on Sundays. The senior pastor will not permit Darlene to serve on any committees or work in the ministry after she told him her husband is financially, physically, and verbally abusing her. The pastor has stopped counseling with Darlene because her husband works diligently at the church and gives large amounts of money to the church. She is a victim of both clergy abuse and domestic violence.

Darlene cannot hold long conversations with any people at the church. Her husband watches her every move, does not allow her to work outside the home, and controls all the money. He has threatened to kill her dogs if she tries to leave. She is terrified of her husband but refuses to leave because she fears for the animals.

Jackie is an African American woman who is in an abusive marriage. Her husband beats her regularly. He blackens both of her eyes and has broken her bones on several occasions. This has caused her to lose good paying jobs because she was too embarrassed to tell her employer about the abuse. Her children have witnessed the abuse all their lives. Her sons have relationship issues and are abusive to their wives. Her daughter is in a homosexual relationship because she wants nothing to do with men because of what she saw her father do to her mother over the years.

Jerri is a first lady of the church her husband pastors. He has had multiple affairs with women in the congregation. Jerri is also a minister at the church. She has been physically abused during the marriage. Her husband controls the money and often will only buy enough food for himself. When she complains, he verbally abuses her. He often embarrasses her in front of the congregation by telling her to shut up. The congregation has witnessed this abuse and is often subjected to bullying from the pulpit. No one has challenged the pastor's behavior for fear of retaliation and verbal abuse.

Lastly, Mary lives with her abusive boyfriend. She stated during a sexual encounter he stabbed her in the back several times with a hunting knife. He then took her to the hospital emergency room and left her. Mary's hospital stay was for one week to recover from the stab wounds he had inflicted on her. Upon her release she had no place to go. While walking to a local shelter, a car pulled up and demanded her to get in. It was her abusive boyfriend. She admitted to getting in the car and returning to the house. She had no place to go after calling all the Las Vegas women's shelters. Each were filled to capacity with a waiting list. Mary felt hopeless and did not have him arrested for the crime because she feared what he would do to her. The reason for the stabbing is he saw her talking to a male friend without his permission. She fears for her life, has no job or money and feels hopeless.

African American women have a strong sense of community, pride and strength that enables them to endure the silent suffering when abuse are problematic issues in their homes. Many do not have alternative options that will allow them to leave the abusive relationships. "These women are considered to be strong nurturers, with tendencies to provide and place other family member needs above their own. These women have been oppressed to serve, to serve, and to serve, even at the expense of their own safety."¹⁷ Matriarchal roles elevate them to demanding roles and much responsibility for maintaining the family and holding it together.

¹⁷ Lynda Marie Jordan, "Domestic Violence in the African American Community: the Role of the Black Church," 1-24. 2006, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://pluralism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Jordan.pdf>.

For many of the women the instability of an abusive relationship is better than to be alone without any relationship. The belief system in many cases is to raise children in a domestic violence home environment is better than them not having a father. In the class sessions and during the project many of the women agreed that the abuse is generational. Domestic violence is passed from generation to generation and in most black communities accepted as normal behavior. Violence among family members is not always regarded as domestic violence but merely family disputes. Verbal abuse, slapping, and shoving are not considered as criminal offenses. Usually, the women's belief system is it is not anyone's business what goes on in other people's homes. Therefore, they should not interfere in other people's relationships even to the detriment of a life being loss. Domestic violence carries with it a powerfully, strong controlling mechanism that infiltrates the thinking of individuals.

Data collected from the Domestic Violence and Abuse Questionnaire at the end of both the Survivor Sister's Breakfast and the Symposium with Caesars's showed an overwhelming willingness to support domestic violence along with substance and clergy abuse type ministries within local churches and faith-based programs. One hundred and thirteen (93%) of all participants agreed that both meetings were informative; eighty-five (68%) agreed that the church and community should help and, in some way, support all victims. All one hundred and twenty-five people (100%) believed that that their church and local community would offer support by providing some type of education on all the abuse initiatives listed above.

The obstacles to executing and sustaining these programs were expressed at the project meetings and the symposium. People who gave opinions and spoke were given

the opportunity during the project, the breakfast, and symposium question-and-answer time. Most of the people expressed the lack of finances and ongoing participation by the churches and community, and not enough leadership initiative and involvement. Other concerns were the women are fearful of retaliation for disclosing personal business and time restraints due to work schedules, family priorities, and husband or others not allowing them to participate. Toward the end of the weekly sessions, specifically week five, the following post survey was asked again as a reminder of what they had initially been given. The following post survey questions were asked after the weekly discussions. Based on the women's interaction and responses during the project, it was imperative to include more detail regarding the courts and law enforcement.

Table 1. POST SURVEY

Number	Questions
Q1	People who have been victims of Domestic Violence are weak?
Q2	Women who have been abused are insecure in relationships?
Q3	I would not disclose being a victim of abuse to my pastor or church for fear of judgment?
Q4	Women who are abused usually provoke the violence?
Q5	Many women fear filing charges when police get involved?
Q6	I would help my neighbor if she was being beaten and abused?
Q7	I would or would not call law enforcement?
Q8	I do not respect law enforcement because they are dishonest?
Q9	More should be done to help victims of Domestic Violence?
Q10	I feel there should be far more community resources and shelters for women and children?
Q11	The courts system should be stricter on Domestic Violence perpetrators?
Q12	Both parties involved should have mandated counseling by the court?

Q13	Judges in the courts should hand down harder sentences on repeat Domestic Violence offenders?
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Table 2: Twenty women polled, data and percentages that have dealt with situations:

100%	91%	18%	66%	44%
Verbal Abuse Clergy abuse Substance Abuse (alcohol or drugs).	Physical Abuse, Hitting, choking, slap, Punching.	Sexual Abuse, Rape, coercion, Force, failure to stop at no.	Economic and Financial abuse. Animal abuse. Lost jobs due to abuse.	Digital Abuse Texting too much Telephone harassment.

Discussion

All of the results are consistent with the hypothesis of this research project. There is significant change in response for post forum survey items shown. Statistically, the difference is specific to law enforcement and fairness in the justice system. The forum's individuals are willing to become involved with empowering women who are abused. Abuse in any form has negative implications attached and can become a detriment to all parties involved: the perpetrator, victim, law enforcement, support and advocates.

Unfortunately, society's definition of abuse has no validity in African American churches and communities. The challenge of domestic violence is social, financial and spiritual; and all of these components have broken down in both our churches and communities.

Another key contributor to the high intra-family violence rates against women in the African American community is the negative relationship between them and

the criminal justice system. The historical record of how African Americans have been treated in the United States by the judicial system is a paramount problem when dealing with domestic violence in the African American community.¹⁸

There is a great need in Las Vegas, Nevada regarding the high level of domestic violence, intimate partner homicide, and substance abuse. Contributors are often legal marijuana usage and free alcoholic beverages served in the casinos. Also, the clergy abuse in gender biased, patriarchal churches have been oppressive. Yet, there is also a spirit of awareness and concern to oppose and overcome these issues that are so prevalent in the local churches and community. Participants in the breakfast, project, and symposium all agree that we have a clarity and understanding of what the needs are in our churches, faith-based organizations and local community. Our ultimate goal is to fulfill the purpose and be the change agents that God has called each person to be in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Summary of Learning

My consideration, meditation, and reflection on why abuse and the women empowerment project were chosen is based on the fact that abuse has been a very intricate part of my life for my entire life. I clearly understand this. This is a topic that has been my personal story with heartbreak and tears attached. Many women who are going through abuse have feelings of hopelessness and often suicide. These women feel that things will never change, and this is the path they are destined to continue on for life. As outlined in the synergy and contextual papers, clergy abuse, domestic violence, and substance abuse have had a direct or indirect effect on my life.

¹⁸ Lynda Marie Jordan, "Domestic Violence in the African American Community."

Usually one does not understand clergy abuse is happening. It is disguised as submission to the pastor or those in leadership. Disobedience is the terminology when female clergy engage or question the pastors' decisions. It creates a bully pulpit and a hostile environment. Eventually, sermons are directed at that person telling them to be silent or leave.

Women need words of affirmation and a model to lead them out of the dark areas of their lives. To overcome the abuse, it has to be exposed and dealt with in a professional manner. Often the shame and stigma attached to abuse is stronger than the will required to overcome the abuse. They must know they have choices, help and resources available to assist them through the maze of uncertainty in their lives.

In most black churches and communities, abuse in any form is not often addressed. It is taboo, and Christians are "too blessed to be stressed." These are lies that prohibit congregants from seeking out the necessary help. The African American community's unwillingness to disclose the abuse is based on cultural indoctrination: "what goes on in the house, stays in the house." I have concluded that most women want to feel safe and protected in their churches, homes, and communities.

There were so many women in my church that would not even discuss this topic for various reasons. Some wanted to come and sit against the wall just to see what was being discussed without actually participating in the empowerment classes. Unfortunately, as much as I wanted them to remain in the room, it was not fair to the women that shared their hearts and stories. They were asked to either participate in the weekly workshops or leave the class. A few left and others decided it would be beneficial

to their personal and spiritual growth if they stayed. All women who participated were pleased with the end results.

What we learned from every pastor, minister, community leader, and law enforcement person was informative and relevant to the problems in the greater Las Vegas area. The number of women dealing with abuse in their lives and the court system is enormous and there appears to be no immediate resolution in sight. As modern-day disciples, we must view this as more work to be done in the vineyard. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.¹⁹ Those of us who are of the household of faith must be willing to take the challenge and pick up the mantle and begin to empower these women through ministry.

Abuse in some form such as domestic violence, substance, and clergy have been a part of my life for my entire life; so, the work is not tedious. My assurance is inspiring others to come alongside to help in a church or para-church setting. The people who are called to work together in this capacity must be willing to understand there has been an absence of love in the lives of these women. Most have been ostracized and have been physically and emotionally abused. Love and compassion must be the healing balm to help them make the transition from abused to empowered women. Faith is also crucial in this ministry. There must be faith in the ability for women to overcome and make the necessary changes in their lives and relationships. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for him that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”²⁰

¹⁹ KJV.

²⁰ KJV.

It is important for the church and local community to partner together and assist those who are involved in abusive situations. This calls for providing resources and being willing to listen without criticism or judgment. Too often we want to give advice and tell them they should leave the abuse. Unless one can provide shelter and financial stability for them, this is not the best approach. It is best not to offer unsolicited advice no matter what information is divulged. Providing and proposing alternatives can be helpful if they are open to suggestions. Carefully listening before or without interjecting opinions and suggestions is key. Most of the time the women are merely searching for answers on how to make the partner change or stop the violence. Instead of offering negative responses, one should consider becoming or offering a refuge and safe place in their time of need. This will impact their ability to build trust. Praying for them will begin to open other avenues of spiritual healing and emotional stability.

Another phase of the project was when the women and community came together at the Survivor Sister's Breakfast. Yvette Cade, the keynote speaker, along with other church and community leaders, provided additional insight. It also allowed the women to see they are not alone in their struggles. Other women have gone through traumatic abusive relationships and have exited empowered and victorious. Yvette Cade has visible burns on over seventy five percent of her body. Yet, she is still an empowered woman that has taken on the challenge to tell her story in hope it will empower other women in abusive relationships. Every message that was shared is vital to the community coming together as a cohesive unit.

The magnitude of the work determines the need for collaboration and shared vision. Each component is very essential in helping others through their process. This

must happen in order to become an empowered woman that can move forward and mentor others.

This researcher noticed the effect that the classes, project workshops, breakfast, and symposium had garnered and the enthusiasm and willingness among participants on every level. The church, community, speakers, and women have created a culture of openness and a desire to help and involve other women in the empowerment process. There has been positive input and conversation. The misogyny that once was so prevalent at the church has begun to soften and change. It is evident that the women have decided they will no longer be treated as an afterthought or be subservient to the men at Second Baptist or community at large. Pastor Chaney, through his strong and relentless efforts, broke a strong hold in that church.

The researcher was able to position the women that wanted to become more involved and help the younger women. ABC, CARE, and LRS Counseling Agencies have started more groups for the teen girls to educate them on abusive situations. The response has been very good because there is a lot of teen dating abuse and violence. Other groups such as Survivors of Domestic Violence, Recovery Girls, and Silent Whispers have agreed to stand with this project in providing resources and mentoring. Ms. Hannah Brown is interested in helping to move this project forward by helping “Bridge of Faith Outreach and Missio Dei CDC” with community support and finding financial sponsorship. Pastor Chaney also has come alongside and has expressed interest in helping to provide services in various areas to help empower women.

Suggested Improvements for Future Projects

Each participant of the “Women Empowerment” project was totally engaged in the dialogue and success of the project. The group project has inspired the facilitators and participants to start other meetings in the community. Many participants have discussed meeting with community leaders who can galvanize initiatives to acquire more support. As a direct result of the empowerment project, a need to include more training programs has also been noted. It is evident the women are taking the project seriously and is capable and ready to move forward. At the beginning of the project, many of the women were in a comfortable place and had no desire to move towards empowerment or leadership. However, once they were able to see and interact with other women who are survivors of domestic violence, clergy, and substance abuse, they were impacted and motivated. Other women, who had been through the hardship of each aspect of abuse, were the catalyst that moved them forward.

We are looking to partner with the “Women of Color Network, a group of women nationally that are involved in working to stop domestic violence on all levels. They can be instrumental in helping to move the group in the right direction. There was an observation that women and children that are victimized by abuse are in need of assistance on many levels. Yvette Cade stated, “there are more animal shelters available than shelters for women and children.”²¹ It is a contributor to homelessness and health issues. We propose a future dialogue and possible project on the obstacles and difficulties of working with women when children are involved. The church and community have a

²¹ Yvette Cade, “Survivor Sister’s Breakfast,” October 20, 2018, Las Vegas, Nevada October 20, 2018.

responsibility to assist women to overcome hardship and marginalization because they have no hope or help based on the abuse they are encountering. Collaborative methods and models are the key for women empowerment, revival, and restoration.

APPENDIX A

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECT FLYER



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROJECT WEEKLY STUDY GROUP

**THURSDAY'S JUNE 7, 14, 21, 28 – JULY 12, 19-
2018**

5:30 PM TO 6:45 PM

**SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH – THE MIRACLE ON MADISON
500 MADISON AVE
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89106**

Empowerment classes
Experience your personal miracle
Learn your Gifts and Graces
Restore your Joy
Spiritual Formation

**FOR INFORMATION CALL PASTOR BRENDA BRAAM
(702) 325-9226**

APPENDIX B
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant	Age	Gender
A	34	Female
B	44	Female
C	28	Female
D	54	Female
E	50	Female
F	60	Female
G	30	Female
H	25	Female
I	31	Female
J	41	Female
K	51	Female
L	40	Female
M	57	Female
N	26	Female
O	38	Female
P	62	Female
Q	61	Female
R	63	Female
S	29	Female
T	48	Female

APPENDIX C

EMPOWERMENT PROJECT PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

EMPOWERMENT PROJECT PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Date _____

Your Name _____

Age _____ Birth Date _____

What type of abuse are you dealing with? ☐ verbal abuse ☐ psychological abuse
☐ physical abuse ☐ substance abuse ☐ clergy abuse

During the group sessions participants are encouraged to do self-examination and work on personal responsibility, values, goal setting, personal beliefs, and self-image, as well as learn and demonstrate new behavioral skills.

1. Are you committed to the goals of this project?
2. Are you willing to use the Bible and prayer in the study groups?
3. Are you committed to making positive changes in your life?
4. Are you committed to taking personal responsibility for change?
5. Are you committed to understanding the unique factors of this empowerment project?
6. Are you committed to mastering new behaviors?
7. Are you willing to learn new ways to deal with controlling behaviors?
8. Are you committed to work to set realistic goals for your life during this project?
9. Are you committed to learn and demonstrate new behavioral skills?
10. Are you committed to learn assertive training?
11. Are you committed to work diligently on self-defeating behaviors?
12. Are you committed to learn healthy relationship boundaries?
13. Are you committed to learning about stress management techniques?
14. Are you committed to learn healthy ways of anger expression?
15. Are you willing to examine belief systems?
16. Are you committed to become aware of negative life patterns and work to develop new/better ones?
17. Are you willing to disclose to a Licensed Counselor if you are currently being abused?
18. Are you committed to completing the entire six-weeks of the project?

APPENDIX D
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. I understand the value I bring to my relationships at home and at work.
2. I believe I have something valuable to say or do in the world, but I'm not saying or doing it yet.
3. I know my strengths, imperfections, and what makes me unique.
4. I put on a brave and confident face, but secretly I feel like an imposter.
5. I accept my imperfections and look for ways to turn them into assets.
6. I often feel threatened by strong, confident women who seem to have found their voice.
7. I experience anxiety when I have to speak up for myself.
8. I don't really say what I mean so that others won't think I am aggressive.
9. I speak up when I know I'm right, regardless of what others think.
10. I think communicating in a direct way is rude, masculine, and aggressive.
11. There is a cause or subject I secretly really want to speak up about.
12. I follow along with the group instead of speaking up or taking actions I think are right.

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